

IV. REFLECTIVENESS

Crossing the Atlantic

AS I LEFT BRITAIN for the United States in the summer of 1979, some weeks after the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, the world may have been changing, but the intellectual bearings seemed secure. With hindsight, we can see the solid ground of materialism cracking and shifting. As I suggested in chapter 3, between 1977–78 and 1982–83, such influential individuals as William Sewell and Gareth Stedman Jones were already breaking ranks, though not yet disavowing what came before. Most social historians certainly didn't perceive any crisis in what they were doing. The process of institutionalizing, country by country, was still young. In Britain, for example, the freshly established Social History Society and the new flagship journals for the emerging generation of thirty-somethings, *Social History* and *History Workshop Journal*, weren't yet four years old.¹ By the end of the seventies, the disciplinary battles for social history's legitimacy—in terms of hiring, curriculum, graduate training, and the general mood of the profession—had only recently begun. Troubling the underlying project with fresh fronts of self-criticism, querying gains that were still under contention, was hardly high on the agenda.

There were certainly declarations of complaint. I mentioned some of these toward the end of chapter 3, including an article by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese and another by Stedman Jones, both published in 1976. But such voices spoke in the name of social history, rather than wanting to supplant it. For the Genoveses, this seemed to imply a cantankerously reductionist form of class-analytical Marxism based on interest (“who rides whom?”), in a deliberate

provocation anticipating the future appearance of the short-lived U.S. journal *Marxist Perspectives*.² From his side, Stedman Jones urged social historians to have the full courage of their convictions, becoming theorists in their own right rather than relying on the concepts and categories of sociologists. They needed to escape from that dependency into a higher and more confident plane of consciousness.³ At the end of the seventies, an extreme version of these injunctions appeared, an angry jeremiad against what its author called a “progressive dementia” in the discipline. “Now is truly a bad time to be a social historian,” Tony Judt’s article concluded counterintuitively, belying the buoyant momentum of the time. After a scattershot denunciation actually aimed against North American social historians of France, Judt called on “that minority of social historians who remain committed to the proper pursuit of history” to restore “the centrality of politics.” Only by “re-emphasizing, on every occasion, the primacy of politics,” he insisted, could a “history of society” really be pursued.⁴

But these were all pleas for the betterment of social history, not its rejection. On coming to the University of Michigan in fall 1979, I joined a department certainly moving in that direction. The Michigan History Department’s commitment to comparative social science contended at most with a kind of good-natured skepticism, rather than recalcitrance or any outright hostility. The leading journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History* had been edited from the department since 1962, first by the medievalist Sylvia Thrupp (1903–97) and then by the nineteenth-century Europeanist Raymond Grew (born 1930). The Michigan department took for granted intellectual conversation across the more usual geographical and subdisciplinary boundaries. It valued non-Western histories extremely highly, a commitment practiced in the curriculum under the rubric of “comparative” and strongly encouraged by the university’s support for area studies. Michigan’s reputation in the social sciences, centered around the Institute for Social Research, also played a part. The main hub for social historians was the Center for Research on Social Organizations in the Sociology Department, where Charles Tilly (born 1929) held sway. Inside the History Department per se, particularly for graduate students and younger faculty interested in social history, Louise Tilly (born 1930) was the main figure. As a departmental milieu, social history crystallized around the Tillys’ Sunday evening salon, where food was brought and papers were read. But the History Department at

large fully reflected the prevailing disciplinary climate: in a playful poll of departmental preferences, Marc Bloch emerged as the late twentieth century's most influential historian.

At the same time, a sense of difficulty and fermentation—the growing awareness of the sheer range of new ideas waiting to be dealt with—was definitely building. At the turn of the eighties, by far the most important source of disturbance was feminism, as opposed to questions of race/racism, postcolonialism/postcoloniality, histories of sexuality, and the other proliferating multiculturalist and identitarian standpoints presenting themselves later on. But Foucault's ideas were slowly beginning to circulate, as were discussions of psychoanalytic theory, cautious borrowings from literary criticism, the slow subterfuge of Hayden White's *Metahistory* (published in 1973), and influences from cultural anthropology beyond the early essays of Clifford Geertz.⁵ For those of us with a British connection, Raymond Williams remained central, as did the broader discourse of cultural studies gradually attaining stronger institutional shape. Stuart Hall's essays were acquiring greater resonance, while the distinctively "Gramscian" thrust of these British discussions was approaching its peak. In all of these British contexts, the tenor was still avowedly Marxist. In a further dimension, 1978 was also the year of Edward Said's *Orientalism*.⁶

In retrospect, we can see a new set of affinities coalescing. Soon after I came to Ann Arbor, Mick Taussig, then in the Michigan Anthropology Department, suggested we form an anthropology-history reading group from a few younger faculty and graduate students, which duly met on a regular basis during the next couple of years.⁷ Faculty participants included my fellow German historian Michael Geyer, who left for the University of Chicago in 1986; Keith Hart, a British anthropologist specializing on West Africa, then visiting in the Michigan department; the U.S. urban historian Terry McDonald, who, like myself, had just arrived; and the Cuban historian Rebecca Scott, likewise freshly appointed in the History Department and the Michigan Society of Fellows. The graduate students included Friedrich Lenger, then a German Fulbright visitor and master's student in history, now teaching at the University of Giessen; the modern French historian Tessie Liu, now teaching at Northwestern; and the Romanian historian Irina Livezeanu, now teaching at Pittsburgh. We took turns in presenting from our own interests and research, but

I mainly remember the exploratory touching down on a wide variety of unfamiliar grounds. For a while, a local chapter of MARHO, the Mid-Atlantic Radical Historians Organization affiliated with the *Radical History Review*, also flourished in Ann Arbor, with its main axis among younger faculty and graduate students in American Culture and history. Again, the main interest was theory across the disciplines.

The most powerful sign of change I remember from soon after I arrived in the United States was an event improvised by Charles and Louise Tilly to coincide with the first North American Labor History Conference, which occurred in October 1979 at Detroit's Wayne State University. The conference drew a number of younger social historians, mainly in their thirties, from elsewhere in the country, and the Tillys took advantage of their presence to stage a one-day conference in Ann Arbor, to take stock of where things were in social history. Besides a sizable contingent of graduate students and faculty from Michigan itself, the incomers included James Cronin, a historian of twentieth-century Britain; David Levine, a scholar of the social and demographic history of industrialization; Edward Shorter, whose focus was the history of the family; and three leading French historians of the younger-to-middle generation—John Merriman, Joan Scott, and William Sewell. To help discussion, the Tillys proposed an advance reading of the recent articles (mentioned earlier) by the Genoveses, Stedman Jones, and Judt, plus an article in which Lawrence Stone surveyed the relationship between history and the social sciences.⁸ As the theme, they chose “Whence and Whither Social History?”

The day was organized into three sessions: “Has Social History Gone Awry?” “What Choices Face Us?” and “What Should We Do?” Short (one-page) position papers were invited. The Tillys' call to the conference foregrounded the degree to which existing practices of social history were now being vigorously questioned.

Complaints about the crassness, arrogance and naiveté of those social historians who draw heavily from the social sciences have erupted in history since the econometricians burst upon the historical scene. But recent criticism contains some new elements: a desire to substitute cultural analyses and anthropological perspectives for the harder-edged sociological work which became popular in the 1960s; increased questioning of the epistemolog-

ical bases and implicit political orientations of social history, especially as it is practiced in North America and particularly as it is influenced by the social sciences; a tendency of historians who had previously pushed for a rigorous, autonomous brand of social history to develop doubts about the feasibility or desirability of that program.⁹

What struck me instantly at the time was a silence on the obvious common denominator of the three precirculated critiques—their Marxism. My own one-page paper saw the rise of “a more self-confident and self-conscious Marxism” as the real source of the current divisions. While the call to the conference implied the apostacy or desertion of those who’d previously wanted a “rigorous, autonomous brand of social history,” it seemed to me that Marxist critiques were themselves calling “for greater rigor, a more self-confident independence, and a more consistent theory—i.e., for more rather than less autonomy.” So far from “cultural analyses and anthropological perspectives” now being freshly imported, moreover, such approaches had long been constitutive for the kind of social history enabled by Edward Thompson and other British Marxist historians but not encompassed in the Tillys’ social science paradigm. In fact, I doubted whether recent polemics amounted to a general crisis at all. Rather, they described “a field of *internal* disagreement” among social historians, directed not against social history per se but toward competing visions of its future. Marxists wanted social history to follow through on its “totalizing potential” and actually deliver on the ideal of a “history of society.” That was the meaning of the call for a return to politics.¹⁰

Of course, measured by similar discussions a decade later, much else was missing from this conference. Despite the presence of Louise Tilly, Joan Scott, and others, for instance, feminism and women’s history were notably absent from the event’s formal architecture. Race was entirely missing as a category, as were studies of colonialism and empire and the histories of non-Western societies—although, like questions of women’s history, these arrived intermittently in discussions on the day. But most striking of all was the antinomy constructed by the event’s organizers between anthropology and other kinds of cultural analysis, on the one hand, and the true ground of social history, on the other. The Tillys implied, in no uncertain terms, that

turning to culture would be a serious loss, even a betrayal, after all the hard work of social science credentialing during the past two decades. They maintained that a social history based on the methods, theories, and procedures of the social sciences was “rigorous,” whereas a social history based on cultural analysis was not; the latter could only be soft, loose, insubstantial, more elusive, and simply not as serious in its credentials and claims.

For me, the occasion of this conference was fascinating. It was my first encounter with an important network of North American social historians in collective action. It soon became clear that much of the energy came from understandable irritation against Tony Judt’s personalized polemics. But as the discussion unfolded, there was much careful and exploratory self-positioning. Talk recurred to the insufficiencies of “vulgar Marxism,” which seemed to be shorthand for quantitative studies of everyday social relations and material life in all the familiar social historian’s ways. To make good the shortfall of understanding, speaker after speaker agreed, a “more sophisticated kind of cultural history” was now needed. The anthropologists present—notably, Mick Taussig and the South Asianist Bernard Cohn (then visiting from Chicago)—offered their own provocative counterpoint. There was also much reference to European theory and to the British battles among Althusserians and Thompsonians. Initially known across the Atlantic via the debates surrounding Richard Johnson’s critique of Thompson and Genovese in *History Workshop Journal*, these battles were ratcheted forward by Thompson’s intemperate anti-Althusserian tract *The Poverty of Theory*.¹¹

As it happened, those British theory debates were about to reach one particularly unpleasant and chastening climax. At the thirteenth History Workshop in Oxford, on 1 December 1979, Thompson demolished Johnson in the Saturday evening plenary, shocking even his intellectual allies with the angry theatrics of the attack. That Oxford occasion showed many things, but one was certainly the limited usefulness of the sharp binary between “structuralism” and “culturalism,” which Johnson applied to history’s possibilities. Neither Thompson and his allies nor their opponents had foreseen the infinite creativity and greater epistemological radicalism of the coming cultural histories of the 1980s, which eventually broke from the still-shared materialist problematic altogether. So-called culturalists and structuralists had each retained materialist bearings that the new cul-

tural historians would largely disavow. Johnson himself originally declared, "Neither structuralism nor culturalism will do." The logic of a way forward pointed somewhere beyond each. In Britain, the changed political climate produced by Thatcherism and the rebooting of the Cold War during the early 1980s rapidly relativized those bitterly fought theoreticist battles.¹²

From the Tillys' conference in Ann Arbor, I took an enduring impression of uncertainty and flux. I'd seen an apparently rather cohesive group of social historians, formed around a set of generational friendships and solidarities (both political and intellectual), who were previously convinced of their choices but were now far less sure. While British Marxism and Marxist feminism were called on for part of a possible solution, moreover, this hope was more the vicarious imprint of a partially digested and still emerging antireductionist critique, whose further unfolding across the Atlantic would eventually dissolve the given Marxist problematic altogether. While the conference discussions had generally embraced a spirit of openness and generosity, the closing session was blighted by Charles Tilly's angry intervention directed against various statements in William Sewell's initial presentation, which had referred to their personal disagreements over the desirability of a turn to anthropology. Measured by the good humor of the rest of the day, the effect was shocking. The room was stunned. Interrupting and overriding Sewell's efforts at reply, Tilly wielded all the personal authority of a presiding intellectual patriarch. He reasserted, in no uncertain terms, the primacy of "the harder-edged sociological work" that the conference had clearly been called to defend. "Show me the alternative," he kept demanding. Big things were obviously at stake.¹³

Taking the Turn

Looking back, I find the Tillys' conference a prescient occasion. Within the year, Sewell's *Work and Revolution in France* had been published; Joan Scott had moved from Chapel Hill to Brown, where she began a sustained encounter with poststructuralist thought; and Charles Tilly continued to hold the line. Simply to speak these three names is to register the dimensions of the change. Attached to Tilly during the 1960s (Scott formally so, under the terms of a Social Sci-

ence Research Council training fellowship), Scott and Sewell were probably the leading progeny of the union of history and sociology among European historians. Yet here they were, declaring the new social history to be no longer enough. The discourse of social historians was beginning to disobey, outgrowing its disciplinary containers, spilling across the boundaries its practitioners had thought secure. In a published statement for the Tilly symposium, Francis Couvares said (in language still innocent of the coming times): “The new harlots of cultural anthropology, ‘thick description,’ and semiotics threaten daily to shift the focus, to alter the terms of the discourse.”¹⁴

Yet the published trace of “Whence and Whither Social History?” conveyed virtually nothing of the immediacy of the intellectual breaking point. Charles Tilly noted the challenge of “anthropological work, . . . the study of *mentalités*, and . . . more rigorous Marxist analyses,” but he then proceeded on the assumption that the existing project—namely, “collective biography, quantification, social-scientific approaches, and rigorous studies of everyday behavior”—could go on much as before. The trick was simply connecting it to “the established historical agenda” in language historians could understand. As far as it went, Tilly’s description of social history’s “two callings” was unexceptionable: “asking how the world we live in came into being, and how its coming into being affected the everyday lives of ordinary people; asking what could have happened to everyday experience at major historical choice points, and then inquiring how and why the outcomes won out over other possibilities.”¹⁵ But so long as the cultural construction of those processes was ignored and such categories as “everyday experience” and “ordinary people” weren’t put into question, the formulation would continue not to satisfy. Likewise, Louise Tilly’s problematizing of “work” and “politics” was all to the good: she averred that “to talk about changes in women’s work over time, more rigorous definitions, words, categories are needed”; she further maintained that politics must also be reconceptualized, “so we can talk about the politics of those without formal rights.”¹⁶ But that conceptualizing, it was clear, would happen only on the old materialist ground. In that sense, the book Louise Tilly published jointly with Joan Scott in 1978 (*Women, Work, and Family*) and Scott’s later *Gender and the Politics of History* were separated by far more than a matter of years.¹⁷

This story of the Tillys’ Ann Arbor conference stands in for a much

larger and more ramified set of intellectual histories, with many local variations. It suggested the fracturing of the generational consensus that sustained social history's popularity during the previous decade and a half. The confrontationalism of the resulting debates threatened to divide the profession just as angrily as the earlier struggles for social history had done before. Sometimes, these conflicts were over theory per se, as in the acrimonious attacks on "structuralist Marxism" referred to earlier, which dominated left-wing intellectual life in Britain in the later 1970s. In the next decade, Foucauldian approaches and other poststructuralisms elicited comparable fear and loathing in the United States. Within wider fields of cross-disciplinary innovation, the turning to forms of cultural history was also related to the changing climate of political life. The associated dynamic of generational reflexivity pushed left-wing scholars of my broad generation into bringing their intellectual and political life choices under review. As beneficiaries of the great expansion of higher education, trained during the 1960s and 1970s, we were also the last cohort to make it more easily into secure positions before the academic job market dried up. By the 1980s, the resulting career paths were bringing us tenured access to institutional influence. Increasingly, we were training graduate students, managing research projects, organizing conferences, and editing journals.

The salience of this particular generational voice, its tones, and its preoccupations was magnified by the relative paucity of its successors. The later 1970s and early 1980s saw both a contracting job market and a depletion of the numbers of history graduate students, so that the resulting cohorts of doctoral graduates were less able to build a distinctive generational presence. The divisiveness of the public skirmishing between older social historians and the new cultural historians during the later 1980s heavily overshadowed the intellectual choices available to younger people entering the profession. Only the most courageous and idiosyncratic—or the most conservative and narrow—easily avoided enlistment into the rival camps. This contrasts yet again, in my view, with the later cohorts qualifying after the early 1990s, who were already publishing their books and entering tenured positions by the turn of the new century. By virtue of the revival of an extremely forthright politics of knowledge in the U.S. universities, in an atmosphere infused by the consequences of the so-called linguistic turn, these historians would have a great deal to say

about gender history and cultural studies in the course of claiming their own distinctive voice.

It's hard to plot with any precision the movement out of social history into cultural history. As I've argued, the first wave of stocktaking essays usually tied to a "crisis" in social history—by the Genoveses, Stedman Jones, and Judt—still spoke from familiar materialist ground. They were notably innocent of the poststructuralist and allied theories already driving innovation a few years later. The same innocence applied to other programmatic statements, including the founding editorials of such new journals as *History Workshop Journal* and *Social History* (both launched in 1976) or the compendium of U.S. historical writing edited by Michael Kammen for the American Historical Association in 1980, *The Past before Us*, whose essays were commissioned in 1977–78 in the same climate of the midseventies. All of these examples were borne by the momentum of social history's expansion rather than reflecting the coming uncertainties. A systematic survey of more established journals—such as *Past and Present*, the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, and the *Journal of Social History*, plus general journals with social history content, such as the *Journal of Modern History* or *American Historical Review*—reveals a similar absence of the literary or linguistic theoretical influences soon to characterize the cultural turn. Whereas the latter two journals started noticing the new influences through review essays and discussion forums by the end of the eighties, the older social history journals kept their distance well into the next decade, as did another journal in the vanguard of the earlier exchange between history and social science, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*.

The shift can be tracked through the newer journals, such as *History Workshop Journal*, *Social History*, and *Radical History Review*. We might juxtapose *History Workshop Journal*'s very first editorials, "Feminist History" and "Sociology and History" (1 [spring 1976], 4–8), together with the slightly later "British Economic History and the Question of Work" (3 [spring 1977], 1–4), against the editorial "Language and History" published several years later (10 [autumn 1980], 1–5). If the earlier statements were firmly continuous with the critical materialist departures of the 1960s (evidently connected with the influences of Thompson, Hobsbawm, and the other Marxist historians), the 1980 editorial marked some distance from that founding materialism. *History Workshop Journal* then renamed itself *Journal of Socialist and Feminist*

Historians, simultaneously publishing the guide “Foucault for Historians,” by Jeffrey Weeks (14 [autumn 1982], 1, 106–19). This was followed by the editorial “Culture and Gender” (15 [spring 1983], 1–3). The new feminist literary criticism arrived in review essays by Mary Poovey and Joan Scott (22 [autumn 1986], 185–92). We can note the gradual entry of psychoanalysis via essays by Sally Alexander (17 [spring 1984], 125–49) and Laura Mulvey and T. G. Ashplant (23 [spring 1987], 1–19, 165–73), further confirmed by the full-blown special feature “Psychoanalysis and History,” which showcased four articles (26 [autumn 1988], 105–52), and by the follow-up response by Jacqueline Rose (28 [autumn 1989], 148–54).¹⁸ Another special feature, “Language and History,” included an extremely severe article by Peter Schöttler, “Historians and Discourse Analysis” (27 [spring 1989], 1–65). The same year’s bicentenary issue on the French Revolution then took an almost entirely “culturalist” tack, in what was becoming the prevailing literary-cum-linguistic sense (28 [autumn 1989], 1–87).¹⁹

In the world of historians, this was the much vaunted “linguistic turn”—a general discursive shift in the rhetoric and practice of the profession from “social” to “cultural” modes of analysis. In the course of the 1980s, social history became one site of a more general epistemological uncertainty characterizing broad areas of academic-intellectual life in the humanities and social sciences of the late twentieth century. That flux affected some disciplines more radically than others. It became more central more quickly in literary studies and anthropology, for example, than in the “harder” social sciences, such as sociology. It was also no accident that the furthest-reaching discussions occurred in the new and nominally “un-disciplined” areas of women’s studies and cultural studies. Exactly why such a pointed and powerful convergence of new thinking should have occurred across fields and disciplines at this particular time will require much more careful study across many more types of contexts than I have room for here.

In particular, I want to avoid any suggestion that the new departures occurred entirely within thought or that changes for historians were somehow caused by debates within theory or by the impact of a set of philosophical interventions. As with any history of intellectual transition, the ideas concerned will need to be tracked through many particular debates and biographies, numerous individual projects and institutional sites, and all the relevant chains of influence for collabo-

rators and disciples. Intellectual changes also intersect in complex ways with the policy worlds of governmentality and education, with the public spheres of politics and the media, and with nonacademic types of engaged intellectuality. When a fuller or larger history comes to be written, all these aspects will have to be addressed.

Nonetheless, the process included a specifically theoretical dimension, through which certain bodies of thought offered historians resources and strategies they hadn't possessed before. Through the transition I'm describing, certain conditions of possibility became opened or enabled. Certain new languages were proffered. As I argued toward the end of chapter 3, by the end of the seventies, social history was encountering frustrations and insufficiencies for which it had no self-generated solution. This was the impasse from which the cultural turn promised escape. It did so not least by furnishing the tools for self-reflexive examination of the history of social history itself. By focusing on the disciplinary pedigree, it alerted social historians to the forms of their own critical practice. In that sense, the cultural turn offered a way "out" precisely because it opened a way "in." From my own, rather specific vantage point as a modern Europeanist of British extraction living in the United States, that was how I experienced the changes.

First and foremost, the cultural turn enabled a theoretical understanding of gender whose effects transformed the ground of thinking about history. Whether as a dimension of analysis or as an area of empirical work, women's history had been absent from Hobsbawm's benchmark 1971 survey, and simply to reread such older accounts is to experience just how crucial the change has been. This was still true in 1979: none of the four symptomatic essays flagged by the Tillys as the reading for their conference (by the Genoveses, Stedman Jones, Judt, and Stone) grasped the transformative significance of the new women's history, if they acknowledged its existence at all. Only in the later 1970s did a substantial body of monographic work in this area begin to appear. Even then, quite aside from the politics of surmounting the discriminatory practices and prejudices of the profession's given disciplinary regime, much of that new work proved relatively easy to sideline, either because of its conceptual framework of "separate spheres" or because it subsumed the history of women within the history of the family.²⁰ The theoretical move to gender analysis reduced this self-neutralizing effect. Only with the conceptual shift

from the history of women to the history of gender did the protected central precincts of the discipline start to give way. Aside from the resulting histories of sexuality and sexual representations as such, the histories of work, of class formation, of citizenship and the public sphere, and of popular culture were all being reshaped by the close of the eighties.²¹

Second, by the end of the 1980s, the influence of Michel Foucault had become unavoidable. The speed of the reception shouldn't be overstated. His books were available very quickly, but Foucault's ideas remained entirely absent from the earliest pioneering works on the social history of crime, the law, and imprisonment, published in the 1970s. At that time, the English-language reception was conducted around the margins of academic life—in such journals as *Telos* and *Partisan Review* in the United States and by a self-conscious avant-garde of post-New Left journals (such as *Economy and Society*, *Radical Philosophy*, *Ideology and Consciousness*, and *m/f*) in Britain.²² Only by the early 1980s were historians explicitly taking note. After that time, work on prisons, hospitals, asylums and other places of confinement, social policy and public health, and all forms of governmentality became shot through with Foucauldian arguments about power, knowledge, and “regimes of truth.” Looking back at this entire burgeoning field of social and cultural histories during the seventies and eighties, we can see Foucault's ideas less as the direct instigator than as a classic illustration of his own arguments about the shifts in discursive formations. By the 1990s, for example, early pioneers of the social history of crime were taking a strong cultural turn, with superb results—from Peter Linebaugh's *The London Hanged*, through V. A. C. Gatrell's *The Hanging Tree*, to Richard Evans' gargantuan *Rituals of Retribution*.²³ At a level of intentions, Foucault may have been inessential to these authors' new directions—for instance, an excellent sampling of German research edited by Evans revealed little of Foucault's explicit presence.²⁴ But their works couldn't be imagined without him.

Furthermore, Foucault's reception vitally redirected thinking about power, away from conventional, institutionally centered conceptions of government and the state and from the allied sociological conceptions of class domination, toward a dispersed and decentered understanding of power and its “microphysics.” It sensitized historians to the subtle and complex forms of the interrelationship between power and knowledge, particularly in its forms of disciplinary and

administrative organization. It delivered the exceptionally fruitful concept of discourse as a way of theorizing the internal rules and regularities of particular fields of knowledge (their “regimes of truth”) and the more general structures of ideas and assumptions that delimit what can and can’t be thought and said in specific contexts of time and place. It radically challenged the historian’s conventional assumptions about individual and collective agency and their bases of interest and rationality, forcing us instead to explore how subjectivities are produced within and through languages of identification that lie beyond the volition of individuals in the classical Enlightenment sense.

Not least, Foucault encouraged a rethinking of what historians understood by “the archive.” He sought to break history out of its desire for the exclusive specificity of the origin and the sequential linearity of progressive time, aiming to reconstitute, instead, the forgotten places where new ways of understanding the world came to be imagined. His “genealogical investigations” helped historians review their given attitudes toward evidence and the empirical. Against the grand explanatory designs of the birth of the modern world, he sought to foreground the disparaged and overlooked; against the wish for a revealed continuity, he stressed interruption and dispersion, “the accidents, the minute deviations . . . the errors, the false appraisals and faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us.”²⁵ In Foucault’s distinctive usage, genealogies retrieved the marginal, the disadvantaged, and the lowly from the suppressed and occluded “ahistorical” corners where conventional historians tended to banish them, demanding a different kind of archive for the story to be told. This could show that

things “weren’t as necessary as all that”; it wasn’t as a matter of course that mad people came to be regarded as mentally ill; it wasn’t self-evident that the only thing to be done with a criminal was to lock him up; it wasn’t self-evident that the causes of illness were to be sought through the individual examination of bodies.²⁶

None of this redirection came easily. For some years after Foucault’s writings entered currency, scarcely a meeting of historians passed without dismissive jokes or irritated complaints about his “unhistorical” procedures. But for those bristling against the dry and disembodied work of so much conventional historiography, an

extended encounter with Foucault's writings resuscitated the archive's epistemological life. Far from supplanting or discarding an older empirical approach, discursive analysis became its complementary and coexistent partner. By engaging the archive as a "material event," Foucault offered a kind of "radical empiricism." Rather than approaching the archive merely through critique, he exposed its principles of construction. In so doing, he revealed the space of communication between the thought and the time of culture, or between knowledge and the weight of history. He found the "root" ground where the empirical might come to representation, the enabling structures that allowed the category of the empirical (and its authority) to speak itself. Put another way, if we understand Foucault's critique of epistemology as essentially an interrogation of its conditions of possibility, those conditions themselves become a form of materiality. By restating the archive as a question, Foucault challenged historians to think about the very ground from which history could be written.

A third aspect of the cultural turn concerned the fate of one of the main existing approaches to cultural analysis among social historians, that of the *Annales* tradition in France. For much of the 1970s, the history of mentalités functioned as a panacea for many social historians. It seemed a compelling alternative to the canonical, high-cultural, and formalistic-exegetical kinds of intellectual history; it promised access to popular cultures of the past; it provided ground for the application of quantitative methods and of approaches from anthropology; and it was animated by the enticing vision of a "total history." For a while, the translation and reception of the major *Annales* works, orchestrated by a few well-placed admirers, was virtually uncritical: "social history seemed to turn around the *Past and Present-Annales* axis."²⁷ Then the climate seemed to change. The tone of the symposium inaugurating the avowedly Braudelian new journal *Review*, in 1978, was still largely celebratory, but by the mid-1980s, a series of prominent and extremely searching critiques had appeared.²⁸

Together with the unwillingness of the *Annalistes* themselves to theorize their understanding of culture, those critiques successfully exposed the reductionisms and unspecified determinisms at the core of the work of Braudel and Ladurie. Critiques by Dominick LaCapra and Roger Chartier also recuperated the ground that intellectual history seemed to have ceded earlier to the history of mentalités. Neither of those developments ultimately compromised the achievements of

Bloch and Febvre or precluded the potential ongoing production of cultural history in the classical *Annales* mode, suitably rethought in the light of contemporary ideas. But on the whole, historians' discussions of culture moved elsewhere, either outside the main early modern locations of *Annales*-influenced work or onto the ground of language where the running was being made by feminist theorists and intellectual historians, either untouched by the *Annales* paradigm or directly critical of it. Now, the more interesting readings of early modern culture were tending to come not just from social historians inspired directly by *Annales*, who'd set the pace in the 1960s and 1970s, but from literary critics interested in Mikhail Bakhtin.²⁹

Fourth, another body of cultural analysis, that of contemporary cultural studies, exerted extraordinary influence, without yet having produced very much specifically historical work. A still emergent cross-disciplinary formation during the 1980s, cultural studies comprised a miscellany of eclectic influences—sociology, literary scholarship, and social history (but not, interestingly, anthropology) in Britain; communications, film studies, literary theory, and reflexive anthropology in the United States, where strong institutional support would also come from women's studies, American Culture, African-American studies, and ethnic studies programs more generally. The U.S. momentum came from the humanities, without much convergence with the concurrently proliferating interdisciplinary initiatives in social science. In Britain, in contrast, where the prevalence of qualitative sociologies blurred the severity of the divide between social science and the humanities, developments ran in the opposite direction. On both sides of the Atlantic, feminist theory was to record decisive influence, as would the gathering post-Saidian critique of colonial and racialized patterns of thought inside the Western cultural tradition. By the early 1990s, the two national discussions had definitely converged.

The range of topics pioneered in cultural studies reads like an inventory of the new areas gradually opened up by historians in the wake of their own "cultural turn." Cultures and economies of consumption and entertainment, whether approached in mass or luxury terms, became one of the first of these, generating elaborate projects from the eighteenth century to the present. For both funding and critical purchase, this interest fed patently off the processes of capitalist restructuring driven so relentlessly forward during the 1980s, as did serious work on the visual technologies of film, photography, video,

and television, extending into commercial media (such as advertising, comic books, and magazines).³⁰ Feminist scholars explored the relationship of women to popular reading genres (including romances, family sagas, and gothic novels), to television soap operas and sitcoms, and to popular cinema through film noir, melodrama, science fiction, and horror.

Before the 1990s, any presence of historians within this emergent universe of cultural studies was extremely thin: among the forty-four contributors to the benchmark volume *Cultural Studies* (the published record of a spectacular international gathering of the field at Urbana-Champaign in April 1990) were only four historians, none of whom taught in a history department.³¹ But the territories being charted were eventually occupied by great numbers of historians. In addition to the topics already mentioned, thematics pioneered in cultural studies increasingly dominated history's disciplinary landscape by the end of the nineties. Examples include the use of autobiography and the personal voice, postcolonial cultural critiques, the reopening of debates around high versus low culture, explorations of popular memory, and the study of representations of the national past. Whereas most concrete research initially focused on the era since 1945 (the "long present" of cultural studies), interest soon transferred to earlier times.

Fifth, with the cultural turn came an acceleration of the dialogue between history and anthropology. Versions of this accelerated dialogue could already be encountered at the height of the social history wave in the 1970s, notably in the ubiquitous citations of Clifford Geertz's advocacy of "thick description" or in Edward Thompson's reflections on "anthropology and the discipline of historical context."³² The conversation appeared in the pages of *Past and Present* during the early 1960s and went back earlier still to such isolated works as Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels*. In certain historiographical contexts—notably, the pioneering scholarship on colonialism and decolonization in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America—the closeness of historical and anthropological work had always been clear. But during the 1980s, a big fracturing that occurred in anthropology's main understandings of "culture" changed, from a historian's point of view, the valency of the ethnographic epistemology associated with Geertz. As a result, the mere "opening of difference to sympathetic cross-cultural understanding" became called radically into question as a sufficient

description of the anthropologist's charge.³³ Again, this story varied from country to country. In the United States, anthropology's disciplinary coherence became disordered by an explosion of new thinking about agency and action. There, the discipline's boundaries were blown completely open by the impact of poststructuralism, feminist theory, literary theory, and Foucault.³⁴

For historians already engaged in rethinking their approach to culture, the resulting debates had big implications. Anthropology's inscription into colonial and broader imperialist relationships during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had made it part of the machinery of values and belief that helped structure Western forms of modern subjectivity. It not only became a source of colonial knowledge in the more obvious technical ways but also rendered the non-Western world "knowable" in the more basic sense, by delivering the theories, categories, and constructs that shaped the metropolitan West's own self-understandings. The same process translated the practices, beliefs, and social relations of indigenous peoples into terms of comparison.

In these connections, accordingly, the new anthropologies of colonialism both revived the historiography of European colonial domination and invited a less encumbered study of the colonized peoples themselves. Such work deauthorized the canonical standing of earlier theorists of the ethnographic encounter. Most important of all, the new critiques turned the "colonizing gaze" back in on itself, making the metropolitan world's constructions of the colonial Other into themselves an object of study. As Edward Said's insights became worked through, anthropologists and historians began to examine the pedigrees of their own disciplines. In the spirit of Said's "contrapuntal" analytic, the history of empire became revealed not as the stage where those disciplines had performed themselves but as the condition for their possibility in the first place. As Franz Fanon had put it, "Europe is literally the creation of the third world."³⁵

The ethnographer's standpoint has been radically deconstructed. The most influential early intervention was undoubtedly the sustained analysis of anthropological texts in the 1986 collection *Writing Culture*, by James Clifford and George Marcus; after it, the innocence of the ethnographer's procedure could never be quite the same again.³⁶ A generation of studies proceeded to explore the ways in which ethnographies "make use of various tropes, literary conventions, and narra-

tive devices to establish ethnographic authority and/or certain kinds of unstated visions of the world.” Whereas fieldwork had always sought to show how “‘native’ categories are culturally and historically constructed,” the privileged standpoint of anthropology itself had survived, because the ethnographer’s own categories had never been subject to the same close scrutiny.³⁷ However, once the objectivity of the ethnographer’s gaze was brought under exhaustive critique (within a new paradigm of situatedness and self-reflexivity), the previously accepted protocols of fieldwork started to come apart.

Each of these developments—the problematizing of fieldwork, the critique of the ethnographic encounter, and the self-questioning of the anthropologist’s place in the colonial relationship—have produced a turning back into the anthropologist’s own society. Encouraged by the breaking down of disciplinary boundaries, anthropologists began the serious investigation of the contemporary United States. Similarly, kinship, family, religion, and ritual were toppled from their natural dominance of the cultural anthropologist’s research agenda, which on the contrary became radically opened up. That agenda could now include everything from the forms of legitimacy of the Latin American state, representations of history in Andean popular culture, and the contemporary dynamics of genocidal violence in Rwanda and Sri Lanka, to the patterns of transnational migration in the post-Fordist economy, the scandals of televangelism of the late 1980s, and the experience of a New Jersey high school graduating class between the 1960s and the present.³⁸

Two Disruptions

Two further aspects to the cultural turn of the 1980s don’t fit cleanly into any integrated narrative of unfolding individual and collective change but certainly had a vital presence—sometimes as a productive incitement, but more often as an uncomfortable supplement, a kind of continuous second-guessing. One of these involved questions of “race”; the other concerned the related problems of colonialism and postcolonialism. Of course, historians, especially those on the left, were painfully aware of these issues long before the arrival of the cultural turn. Indeed, certain fields were centrally concerned with them, most obviously in large parts of U.S. history, in studies of slavery and

emancipation, or in the history of colonized societies. But before the generality of social historians could begin properly seeing the importance of “race” (above all, for the study of Europe’s metropolitan societies), some sustained political encounter would be needed, a jolt or a shock, much as the earlier acceptance of “gender” had required a similar political process of recognition.

Taking such concerns into one’s default grasp of the shape of the social world and how it works, rather than treating them as discrete and demarcated subjects of interest to specialists, was something new. For social historians of classic materialist bent, class had always supplied the main lens for studying the behavior and attitudes of particular social groups, whatever the precise definitions of class position and class belonging preferred. Where racism was most palpably present in the practices and outlook of a particular working class, as in the United States, social historians struggled with finding some basis for distinguishing “class” from “race” in the explanatory framework being used; for the answer, they invariably cleaved to the “harder” or “more objective” rootedness of class in the actually existing social relations of property and workplace. Lacking any comparable objective basis in biology or scientifically founded differences, “race” could then be presented as “entirely socially and historically constructed as an ideology in a way that class is not.” The varying forms racist ideology took—including its material existence and instituted practices, all the ways in which it became a basis for action as an “ideological” category—could then be tackled using the familiar social historian’s methods.³⁹

As Barbara Fields pointed out in one of the best statements of this view, approaching race as an ideological construct certainly didn’t imply that it was “illusory or unreal.”⁴⁰ Fields explained: “Nothing handed down from the past could keep race alive if we did not constantly reinvent and re-ritualize it to fit our own terrain. If race lives on today, it can do so only because we continue to create and re-create it in our social life.”⁴¹ But despite this acknowledgment of ideology’s social materiality, such approaches tended to treat racial ideology as mainly a mask for interests located elsewhere, as a language devised to secure and reproduce a superordinate structure of interests and authority, whose vocabulary directly reflected the society’s unequal distribution of wealth and power. Even while specifically emphasizing the “realness” of racial ideology, therefore, these approaches implicitly referred it to the underlying sovereignty of

social explanation. They invariably related “race,” in some ultimately determining sense, to the more decisive structural facts of property ownership, job competition, access to social and cultural goods, distribution of community power, and so forth.

David Roediger observed of this syndrome, “The point that race is created wholly ideologically and historically, while class is not wholly so created, has often been boiled down to the notion that class (or ‘the economic’) is more real, more fundamental, more basic, or more *important* than race, both in political terms and in terms of historical analysis.”⁴² This was especially a problem for historians working in U.S. labor history. But much more generally, unpalatable ideologies, such as racism or xenophobia, tended to be externalized or otherwise relativized from treatments of working-class formation during the 1960s and 1970s, much as Tim Mason’s work had stressed the limited success of Nazism in breaking down the defensive resilience of the German workers’ class-conscious culture. No matter how rich and sophisticated its detailed analyses or empirical instantiations, “base and superstructure” materialism ultimately tended to sell the complexities of ideological analysis short. Even the most sophisticated such analyses tended to reduce “race” to one kind of “ideological device” or another, emphasizing its origins and functions in some larger system of mystification where it serviced a dominant structure of “political, economic, and social power.”⁴³

Seeking to understand racism’s efficacy culturally by getting inside the appeals of racial thought—trying to grasp how “race” worked as a lived identity or as a credible source of meaning, as a persuasive strategy for bringing imaginative order to the material world—challenged these existing practices of social history. Gradually during the 1980s, though, some historians began exploring racial thinking in its own terms like this. They approached it as a type of subjectivity requiring more than a readily legible relationship to benefits and privileges or a calculus of interest in order to achieve its purchase. Fully cognizant of both the power-related aspects of racist practices and the violence associated with maintaining racialized systems of inequality and exploitation, such an approach argued for cultural analyses of racial distinction as well. In this view, racism subsisted on combinations of explicit, partially articulated, and unconscious assumptions and beliefs, while engendering more insidious forms of collusion and complicity than violent coercion could deliver alone. This was the difficult

step in question: being able to see racialized forms of understanding as comparable in importance, cognitively and ontologically, to a person's social provenance and class location in helping shape her/his sense of belonging in the world. As well as being a system of coercive power and violent inequality, in other words, "race" also needed to be understood as a discursive formation.

By the early 1990s, this context produced Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness*.⁴⁴ This book, clearly incited by the transatlantic version of the new rightward political conjuncture (it was written "in reaction to the appalling extent to which white male workers voted for Reaganism in the 1980s"), bespoke a loss of materialist confidence in the sufficiencies of social history similar to the one I've been describing.⁴⁵ It certainly presented a bleak view of the alleged opportunities for cross-racial labor solidarity in the nineteenth-century United States, although, by this time, a rich and nuanced historiography on the subject hardly made this very controversial. More damagingly, it queried efforts to salvage nineteenth-century labor republicanism as the distinctive U.S. form of a generic process of working-class formation: though the democratic élan of this working-class political culture may have been impressive, its racist and exclusionary features had been too easily effaced, as was the absence of black workers from the story provided.⁴⁶ Still more searchingly, Roediger raised the question of the psychic compensations workers derived from acquiring a "white" racial identity under the simultaneous impress of becoming proletarianized: "[T]he pleasures of whiteness could function as a 'wage' for white workers. That is, status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships, North and South."⁴⁷ New languages of racialized class identification, postures of assertive masculinity, the ambivalent pleasures of such popular entertainments as blackface and minstrelsy—all these inscribed whiteness with a set of powerful meanings whose particular virulence came from negative definitions of slave or free blacks.⁴⁸ In this way, Roediger argued, "race studies" became a necessary tool of self-analysis for dominant North American subjectivities.

With the *Wages of Whiteness*, we are back once more to the social historian's old difficulties with culture, ideology, and consciousness. Roediger and historians of his bent started to argue that the social historian's existing repertoire dealt poorly with the insidiousness of racial thinking in the forming of working-class subjectivities. Drawing

modestly on psychoanalytic theory and a “socio-ideological” approach to language based on Williams and Bakhtin, Roediger shifted focus decisively to the “cultural,” paying creative attention to such sources as folklore, popular humor, street language, song, and popular entertainment. Most important of all, he forthrightly returned to the study of ideology as such, offering a novel perspective on how to analyze dominant ideological forms. Under this perspective, “whiteness” was an invitation to participate in the benefits of a dominant culture whose principles of access were all the more efficacious for being unstated. In a public culture so relentlessly focused around race and its languages of distinction, the primary term of privilege, authority, and general potency went unnamed and unmarked: “race” belonged to the non-white minorities; the normal condition of being American was “white.” If the nation was “a structure of power that circumscribes and shapes the identities to which individuals and groups can aspire,” whiteness became crucial not only to social goods and psychic well-being but also to political faculties of citizenship and belonging.⁴⁹

How did this impinge on the awareness of a modern European historian? However widely one reads or discusses, there’s a difference between noticing important departures in other fields and moving from such abstract and detached encounters into one’s own work—especially in this case, when the other context in question was the United States, whose histories and legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, migration, and immigration seemed so self-evidently different. The temporality of this particular intellectual history was also “off,” post-dating the other developments I’m describing by about a decade: Roediger’s impact came at the start of the 1990s, when the cultural turn was already in full swing. So how were Europeanists thinking about these questions? Why didn’t “race” join “gender” earlier during the 1980s on the leading conceptual edge of the cultural turn?

In fact, since the late sixties, the confrontational dialectic of racist and antiracist actions had been violently troubling public life in Britain (and elsewhere in Europe). Escalating anxieties about immigration, dramatized in Enoch Powell’s notorious “rivers of blood” speech in April 1968, brought issues of race into the centerground of political awareness; indeed, a mass demonstration against Powell at the Oxford Town Hall in 1968 provided my own initiation into direct-action politics.⁵⁰ During the seventies, questions of race and immigration formed one main crucible for the right-wing radicalization that

culminated in the Conservative election victory of 1979 and the rise of Thatcherism. What interests me in retrospect, though, is the intactness of the separation between the disturbing presence of these political developments and my own historical interests. Actually, the two were bleeding into each other fairly continuously, but bringing this fact to consciousness took a much longer time.

One important marker was the 1978 publication of *Policing the Crisis*, by Stuart Hall and a collective of authors from the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS).⁵¹ During the seventies, the CCCS housed an intensive exchange between British traditions of cultural criticism and social history, on the one hand, and European grand theory, on the other. In effect, Williams and Thompson were encountering Althusser, Gramsci, and Foucault.⁵² Taking off from the moral panic in August 1972 surrounding an instance of “racial mugging” in Handsworth, an important Birmingham center of black British population, *Policing the Crisis* showed how the issue of “law and order” had recast the agenda of British politics to become the centerpiece of an emergent racialized imaginary for the New Right. In an argument, reaching back over two centuries, about the British state and its legitimacy, the state was seen to be losing its capacity for organizing popular-democratic consent, leading to a political crisis in which racialized anxieties eased the passage to a more coercive and authoritarian period. But whereas racism was clearly a central term of the crisis this book diagnosed, “race” still figured mainly as a signifier for other things. Though the “race text” ran right through the center of the analysis, it receded, in a way, into the broader argument about the state, hegemony, and class.

The publication four years later of *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, by another CCCS collective, angrily protested this earlier effacement of race.⁵³ Paul Gilroy and his coauthors insisted that recognizing the pervasiveness of racial ideology had to become central to the analysis of contemporary British politics, because notions of British identity (and notions of the “Englishness” at their heart), were structured around powerful assertions of racial difference. These fed partly on the imperial past, partly on the postimperial social antagonisms of Britain’s decline. Contemporary national identity was centered around an unmarked and unspoken whiteness, while marginalizing the presence of Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, and other minority populations. Indeed, the silencing of one population was an

entailment of the primacy of the other. For all its crucial oppositional importance, furthermore, even the radical reworking of British traditions in the thought of Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson, and the New Left had reinscribed the same latent ethnocentrism. By bringing these assumptions into the open, *The Empire Strikes Back* sought to force the “Britishness” or “Englishness” of cultural studies into self-consciousness and voice.

In some obvious ways, this approach presaged the coming U.S. critiques of whiteness. It also reflected the incipient movement away from older habits of class-centered analysis, toward a recognition that consciousness, identity, and subjectivity are formed in other ways, too. As Gilroy wrote elsewhere, this analysis “challenge[d] theories that assert the primacy of structural contradictions, economic classes, and crises in determining political consciousness and collective action.”⁵⁴ The argument drew its urgency from the political times: if more self-conscious subcultural identities were beginning to coalesce around British blackness during the seventies, these were more than matched by a mainstream Conservative drive for the recentering of national identity around an aggressively exclusive vision of Englishness, for which race held the key.⁵⁵ During the 1980s, the continuing eruption of racialized conflicts into public life slowly unsettled scholarly approaches to British history and allowed the earlier histories of racial attitudes to be brought into prominent focus.

Over the longer term, this shift encouraged a new appreciation of the empire’s constitutive importance in delivering the operative bases of social and cultural cohesion for modern metropolitan Britain, particularly via its impact on popular culture and the dominant sociopolitical values. But for present purposes, the most striking thing about this new registering of the empire’s centrality was the degree to which card-carrying historians themselves were not involved. The role of CCCS—a deliberately transdisciplinary organization, whose innovative historical work was conducted precisely away from the surveillance of a history department—has just been cited. But more generally, the challenge came from the margins even of cultural studies—for example, in the critiques of an emergent black arts movement and its interest in “diaspora aesthetics” or from outside Britain altogether, in literary studies in the United States.⁵⁶ In this period, a benchmark volume on definitions of Englishness, produced by historians, left imperialism out entirely.⁵⁷

Of course, there was no shortage of monographic research either exploring the political, military, and economic histories of the empire's creation or assessing the importance of colonies for the home country in those same respects. In the 1970s, social historians also turned in large numbers to the local histories of the colonial encounter, where they examined the establishment of British rule in particular places. As long as culture continued to be regarded as "superstructure" or was set aside for the specialized attention of anthropologists, it was easily bracketed from these accounts. But once culture became rethought as residing in practices as well as ideas (in Benita Parry's words, "as itself a material practice producing representations and languages that embody active forms of power and is constitutive of a social order"),⁵⁸ no work had more impact in helping that awareness along than Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said's work

assert[ed] the indispensable role of culture as the vital, enabling counterpoint to institutional practices, demonstrating how the aggrandisement of territory through military force and the bureaucratic exercise of power in the colonies was sustained by the ideological invasion of cultural space, while at home the fact of empire was registered not only in political debate and economic and foreign policy, but entered the social fabric, intellectual discourse, and the life of the imagination.⁵⁹

Concurrently with the new work on race, therefore, histories of colonialism also began registering an extremely far-reaching transformation. Awareness of the issues made swiftest headway in literary criticism, cultural studies, anthropology, geography, and historical fields with an existing anthropological presence (as in South Asia). But European historians also came gradually to see the point—namely, the degree to which the social relations, cultural practices, and axiomatically racialized discourse of national superiority that were generated overseas in the subordinated extra-European world became powerfully reinserted into European metropolitan frames.

"Colonial knowledge"—forms of colonial representation through literature, photography, museums and exhibitions, mass entertainment, commercial advertising, and all areas of popular culture—became an especially fruitful field of inquiry. The gendering of national identity, whether through militarism and warfare or in the more general ordering of nationalist representations around images of

masculinity and femininity, was also explored in its colonialist dimensions—as, for example, in the anxieties surrounding colonial intermarriage and all manner of affective attachments in colonial settings, including the management of sexuality, child-raising arrangements, and the forming of friendships. These areas of intimate life were intricately related to matters of colonial governance and affairs of state. They accumulated huge bodies of discourse around gender inequalities, sexual privilege, class priorities, and racial superiority, which, in turn, became subtly rearticulated into nationalist talk at home.⁶⁰

If the complex back and forth between Europe and its “Others” has been constitutive for the possible understanding of political identities since the late eighteenth century, as Said and other critics of Enlightenment traditions claimed, such unequal reciprocities have also been replicated inside European societies themselves—between metropolitan and peripheral cultures, between town and country, between high and low cultures, between dominant and subordinate nationalities and religions, between West and East. This has been clearest, perhaps, in the perceptions and consequences of the nation form. An awareness of nationalism’s negative codings, of the ways in which even the nation’s most generous and inclusively democratic imaginings entailed processes of protective and exclusionary centering against others (often extraordinarily subtle, but also including the most violent versions of direct colonial rule), has been one of the most important gains of the last two decades. In colonizing the world, metropolitan nations also created hegemonies of possible meanings. Even the most radical and self-conscious of oppositional, anticolonial, or minority movements have necessarily mounted their emancipatory demands from a ground of identity that colonialism’s power had already laid down.

One of the most important bodies of historical work engaging these questions developed around the Subaltern Studies project, initiated at the end of the 1970s by a group of younger South Asian historians from India, Australia, and Britain, who were inspired by the more senior Ranajit Guha (born 1922), a Marxist historian of rural society in colonial Bengal who was teaching at the University of Sussex. In the series *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, including eleven volumes from its beginning in 1982 to the time of this writing, this group sought to intervene in Indian historiography on three distinct fronts, in each case contesting the influence of a power-

ful adversary in the politics of knowledge. They opposed, first, the celebratory historiography of the nationalists, who subsumed popular politics in the progressivist master narrative of the creation of the Indian nation-state; second, the “Cambridge school” of British South Asianists, who preferred an interest-based interpretation of Indian politics emphasizing elite factionism rather than mass-based mobilization; and finally, the class-based economic determinism of an Indian Marxist tradition.⁶¹

The project took its name self-consciously from Antonio Gramsci, who used the term *subaltern* for subordinate social groups lacking organized political autonomy. Growing from Guha’s earlier Communist Party background and an impressively early discussion of Gramsci’s ideas in Indian Marxist circles (going back to the late 1950s), this also suggested affinities with the work of Thompson, Hobsbawm, and other British Marxist historians drawn to Gramsci.⁶² As such, the project had all the same resonances of the “history from below” familiar from the British social history wave already in progress. It signified a valuing of “the politics of the people” that established historiographies had variously suppressed. Guha’s original preface declared that the study of the subaltern, connoting the “general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way,” could allow the forms of popular resistance to be recovered and reassessed. Gramsci’s category of the “organic intellectual” was also important for the self-understanding (and affective pleasure) of these politically engaged historians.

I encountered Subaltern Studies personally early on, when I noticed the first volume in an Oxford catalog and ordered it blind, partly because of the Gramscian intimations, partly because of an interest in forms of peasant political action. Unsurprisingly, given the discipline’s prevailing demarcations, I’d been unaware of Ranajit Guha’s presence at Sussex; the university’s chosen interdisciplinary organization by regions of the world made it unlikely that the paths of a graduate student in European history and a South Asian historian on the faculty would ever cross. Later in the 1970s, I spent much time dabbling in the historiography of peasant movements in various parts of the world, and by the early eighties, I claimed a passing familiarity with the work of several of the Subaltern Studies authors, yet I had no real inkling about the focus and intent of this new initiative. Similarly, I knew enough Indian historiography from my Cambridge years

(1975–79) to recognize a new body of oppositional work when I saw it, yet I had little sense of how this added up.

Things fell into place much later, when a powerful jolt in the public intellectual climate of the U.S. universities in the later 1980s brought “Western” and “non-Western” historiographies into direct conversation in quite new ways—sometimes smoothly, sometimes jaggedly, always with great and lasting intensity. The complexities of that encounter far exceed the bounds of what I can deal with here. The impetus came partly from the contemporary politics of multiculturalism and race, partly from all the sociocultural and political fallout from the transnationalized restructuring of the world capitalist economy we now call globalization, and partly from the autonomous course of interdisciplinary discussions inside the academy itself. Once certain kinds of academic debate got under way, powerfully driven by the pedagogies of multicultural exchange and coexistence (for which the universities acquired such overwhelming responsibility in the United States), the influence of Edward Said and other theorists of the “postcolonial,” such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (born 1942) and Homi Bhabha (born 1949), soon kicked in.

By the early 1990s, “postcolonialism” had begun defining the center ground for scholars working in cultural studies, providing those interested in connecting Third World and metropolitan histories with a challenging new frame. But once again, historians—especially historians of Europe—became only haltingly involved. Some may have been reading the relevant theory during the intervening years, but any transference into concrete and discernible research projects, in ways that changed how European history could be written and taught, took much longer to occur. Moreover, for theorists, too, this process was more protracted. For those living in Europe, the main ground of priority during the 1980s—theoretically and politically—remained an older sense of European priority. For instance, Stuart Hall had been writing about questions of race brilliantly and consistently since the 1970s, but as one term of a wider theoretical repertoire and often in parallel to his main concerns, which included successive episodes of “wrestling” with theory, the critique of Thatcherism, and the engagement for “New Times.”⁶³ “Race” acquired primary salience only toward the end of the 1980s as the wider political priorities shifted and the discourse of postcolonialism coalesced.⁶⁴

During the initial stages of the cultural turn, in the first half of the

1980s, awareness of “race” and colonialism crystallized for European historians somewhere beyond their main immediate scholarly preoccupations. The active processing of Said’s ideas proceeded at first almost exclusively among literary scholars and, to some extent, anthropologists.⁶⁵ But sometime between the later 1980s and the early 1990s, a conjunction was made. Literatures that had previously stayed apart began to speak to each other, across disciplinary and international boundaries.⁶⁶ Clearly, there were particular local and institutional contexts for how that happened.⁶⁷ By 1992–93, a spate of major works—still rarely authored by historians in the formal disciplinary sense—signaled the arrival of colonialism on the Europeanist’s historiographical map. These works included Paul Gilroy’s retheorizing of modernity via the histories of black migration, in *The Black Atlantic*; Mary Louise Pratt’s study of travel writing and the aesthetics of transculturation, in *Imperial Eyes*; a special issue of *History Workshop Journal* entitled “Colonial and Post-Colonial History”; a pathbreaking volume on *Nationalisms and Sexualities*; Michael Sprinker’s critical anthology on the work of Edward Said; and Said’s own new work, *Culture and Imperialism*.⁶⁸ At this point, discussions concerned with the extra-European colonial worlds looped back to reshape understandings inside Europe in very powerful ways.⁶⁹

Among the authors of those imported extra-European historiographies, the Subalternists were an especially coherent and influential grouping. Increasingly noticed outside the immediate South Asian field by the early nineties, their approach was also being worked into a program for frankly oppositional popular histories elsewhere, most notably in Latin American studies.⁷⁰ Really striking in retrospect, though, is the degree to which Subaltern Studies negotiated, within its own trajectory, all the aspects of the transition from social history to cultural history experienced by historians of Europe in these same years. Under Guha’s inspiration, the group had begun with a primary commitment to histories “from below,” aiming to recuperate the suppressed importance of the Indian masses for the history of anticolonial struggles. While strongly grounded in the Marxist tradition, this ambition likewise patently paralleled the heterodox features of post-Thompsonian social history in Britain, developing an equally creative analysis of the forms and limits of domination in the Indian countryside and seeking to restore a strong and coherent sense of agency to the behavior of the peasantry. Retrieving and elaborating the com-

plexities of the peasantry's presence in the anticolonial movement was the leitmotif for the group's early work, as was a searching review of Marxism's relationship to anticolonial sentiment or "critical nationalism."⁷¹

Like Edward Thompson, for instance, the Subalternists focused on the ramified ambiguities, as well as the straightforward oppressions, in the relations of domination and resistance in the countryside, insisting, with Gramsci, that "subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up." Their writing also displayed the same pull toward culture, focusing not only on "the history, politics, economics, and sociology of subalternity" but also on "the attitudes, ideologies, and belief systems—in short, the culture informing that condition."⁷² To reassemble the submerged coordinates of peasant agency, Guha and his colleagues proved exceptionally creative at reading colonial archives "against the grain," broadening the social historian's usual repertoire toward literary criticism, Sanskrit philology, linguistics, folklore, and structural anthropology. Guha's own pioneering works evoked something of the "patrician society/plebeian culture" framework that Thompson's eighteenth-century essays had been exploring around the same time.⁷³ It postulated

two domains of politics in Indian modernity, the elite-domain based on European/bourgeois grammar of constitutionalism and organized public life, and a relatively autonomous domain of subaltern politics, both coming together in the workings of Indian democracy but operating on distinctly different understandings of power and rule.⁷⁴

But by the time the group was being noticed seriously in Britain and North America (in response to the fifth Subaltern Studies volume, published in 1987), its complexion was already shifting. Early awareness of Foucault quickened easily toward theories of colonial governmentality and the critique of post-Enlightenment systems of knowledge, with inevitable damage to the earlier belief in an authentic peasant consciousness. Such doubts in the subaltern's resistive autonomies, together with the associated loss of confidence in historical materialism, exactly paralleled the uncertainties building up among British and North American social historians during the same period. Openings toward literary criticism, oral history, and anthropology emphasized the distance from the starting points even more.

Most searchingly of all, a poststructuralist critique published by Gayatri Spivak in 1988 under the title “Can the Subaltern Speak?” took the group to task for their highly gendered presuppositions, rejected the centered model of the sovereign subject their project seemed to imply, and, on that basis, questioned the very possibility of retrieving subaltern political agency in the first place.⁷⁵ As the group clarified its thinking in response—engaging seriously with gender, broadening its own ranks, and taking a pronounced “textualist” direction, while devoting more attention to the specificities of India’s differences from the West—divisions began to open. Just as Subaltern Studies emerged into the international limelight during the early nineties, some voices began accusing the group of forgetting the politics entailed in the earlier materialist mission.⁷⁶

In a double sense, however, these later trajectories can be found inscribed at the start. The culturalism embraced in the 1990s was neither the postmaterialist betrayal alleged by its detractors nor its mirror image, the upward progression toward ever greater sophistication or superior antireductionist recognition. On the one hand, the vital departures driving the cultural turn were quite visible in the earliest Subaltern Studies volumes, from the striking synergies of Gramsci and Foucault, through the favoring of microhistories, to the insistence on Indian specificities and a very acute sense of just how difficult recovering popular agency would be. While encompassing real diversities of approach, the early essays already struggled with the perspectival dilemmas now so familiar from current debates. Guha’s reflections on the relation between ideas of history and the forms of domination, drawing on distinctions between mythical and historical time, anticipated later concerns with indigenous idioms of thought, just as his essay “Chandra’s Death” marked out the methodology of the fragment.⁷⁷ Rather than advancing from a lower to a higher level of inquiry—as a simple progressivist model of the transition from the “social” to the “cultural” might suggest—such moves were built into the founding intervention. Thus, the later discussions required less the disavowing of a social history origin than the clarifying of an always detectable ambivalence.

On the other hand, this South Asian historiography both presaged and paralleled the course of the “linguistic turn” in the West. The new culturalist preferences of Subaltern Studies in the nineties were not a corruption resulting from access to the luxuries of postcolonial theo-

ricing in the privileged academies of the United States, as some of the angrier opponents implied. The new culturalism wasn't something that had to be "learned" in the West in that sense at all; its incitements were constitutive from the beginning. Moreover, while, for their part, Europeanists certainly learned a very great deal from the Subalternists as they entered wider circulation, they also had their own points of earlier connection, which, however, were harder to see by the nineties. Like the embittered salvos fired against Subaltern Studies, the field of fire in the West between "new cultural historians" and self-styled Thompsonians was obscuring certain lines of descent. Yet, whether in South Asia or the West, social historians during the 1980s had been responding with theoretical and moral urgency to a set of common problems—those concerning the relationship between social pasts and political futures, between material life and cultural meanings, between the structural ordering of the experienced world and the accessible forms of subjectivity, between history and politics. In this sense, for a Europeanist of my generation, much of what the Subalternists offered linked back through the debates of the 1980s and 1970s—through Foucault, feminism, and Gramsci—to the thinking of Raymond Williams.

This is what I meant by claiming earlier that postcolonial historiographies "looped back" to the earlier moments of radical innovation where this book began. On the one hand, as Said acknowledged, Raymond Williams had surprisingly little to say on the subjects of colonialism and empire as such.⁷⁸ Though a traverser of borderlands, he was otherwise the most rooted and ethnocentered of thinkers; and if determinedly internationalist in his European theoretical range, he wasn't notably inspired by the late twentieth-century florescence of postcolonial literatures, already so exuberantly under way when he died.⁷⁹ On the other hand, his later writings about modernism, with their intense back-and-forth between the novel uprootedness of metropolitan consciousness and the older and more parochial modes of national or regional belonging, echoed powerfully in the efforts of contemporary postcolonial thinkers to struggle through the contradictions of an intelligible cosmopolitanism, on one side, and an affective cultural nationalism, on the other.⁸⁰ So many of the concerns now considered coterminous with postcolonial thought—ideas of subject positionality; of the locatedness of identity; of the lived particularities of place, region, and the body; of the in-betweenness of actually exist-

ing community; and, indeed, of the complex relationship of all those things to the more universal formations of class—were subtly preempted in Williams’s writings, particularly in the incomparable *The Country and the City*, but also in his fiction.⁸¹ Precisely the problematic relationship between universalism and cultural alterity underscores the Subalternists’ most recent work.⁸²

If we see the cultural turn as, in part, enabling a renewed consideration of broad theoretical and methodological purposes (as opposed to validating of any particular empirical and textual content), the influence of Williams was clearly apparent in the first wave of post-colonial analysis. Said recognized that “even one or two pages by Williams on ‘the uses of Empire’ in *The Long Revolution* tell us more about nineteenth-century cultural richness than many volumes of hermetic textual analysis.”⁸³ Said invoked *Culture and Society* when, at the end of his introduction to *Orientalism* (that first ground-breaking interrogation of the Western intellectual tradition), he asserted the need to work toward “the process of what Raymond Williams has called the ‘unlearning’ of ‘the inherent dominative mode.’”⁸⁴ I’m certainly not trying, here, to restore His Majesty’s metropolitan theory to a rickety and tarnished old throne, as the preeminent theoretical model that later non-Western thought could only emulate. On the contrary, if the postcolonial critique of the West’s bad old binarisms means anything at all, it’s to catch the convergences and contingencies of cultural (and theoretical) genealogies and, indeed, to rescue these “impure” spaces as the very site where critical thought might occur.⁸⁵

History in Public

I’m here trying to flag the degree to which debates among historians during the 1980s were shadowed by the wider politics of intellectual change in the public sphere—ranging across the analogous conflicts in other academic disciplines; the commentaries of writers, journalists, and other public intellectuals; all the broader sociopolitical divisiveness of what came to be known as the “culture wars”; and the increasingly transnational or “globalized” dimensions of all such exchange. As a Europeanist, I did not exactly experience the urgency of conflicts over “race” and the “postcolonial” as “noises off”; I was too acutely aware of them for such a metaphor to work. But for most of the

decade, they unfolded somewhat removed from where I did most of my scholarly work.⁸⁶ Even though my sense of being a historian was always formed by a politics, the grounds for that commitment were shifting in vital ways behind my back. Some of the consequences took me by surprise. Moreover, there were other ways in which academic historians were losing control of their subject.

Thus, in wider public arenas, we are now constantly bombarded by all manner of references to history and appeals to the past. All forms of public “memory work,” remembrance, and commemoration—official, commercial, private—have acquired extraordinary momentum, accelerating during the 1980s into a veritable “boom in memory.” The appeal to memory has become promiscuous, an unavoidable feature of the landscape of ideas for anyone interested in grasping the dynamics of social change at the turn of the new century. For historians themselves, moreover, “history and memory” has become an *idée fixe* of the discipline. But that interest massively exceeds any professionalized discourse, saturating large sectors of entertainment, popular reading, commercial exchange, and many other parts of the public culture. What is going on here?

In Fredric Jameson’s view, this intense interest in the past signifies a “nostalgia for the present.”⁸⁷ It bespeaks an anxiety about the loss of bearings and about the speed and extent of change, in response to which the narration and visualizing of history seem to promise a surrogate architecture of continuity. Representations of the past—personal and collective, private and public, commercial and uplifting—become both therapy and distraction, a source of familiarity and predictability while the actual ground of the present turns unstable. Such nostalgia spells the desire for holding onto the familiar even as it dwindles from view, for fixing and retaining the lineaments of worlds in motion, of landmarks that are disappearing and securities that are unsettled.

But by the 1990s the memory boom was also marking the return of “the local” to a central space in contemporary political thinking. This derives in part from the post-1960s revival in Europe and North America of a direct-action politics based on smaller-scale communities and grassroots solidarities. But it also bespeaks the “Think globally, act locally” rhetorics of Green activism and opposition to globalization, which in turn reflect the transnationalizing of contemporary history and the challenge to sovereignties based on the nation-state. This is

precisely the ground of the postcolonial historiography discussed in this chapter's preceding section, a historiography defined by the complex struggles around place and ethnic particularism generated in the wake of empire in its decolonizing and newly revived forms. In each of these contexts, encouraged by the logic of Jameson's "nostalgia for the present," memory work offers a way of resuturing individual stories to collective narratives of belonging and accomplishment at a time when the old models for imagining a political future, especially the socialist ones, no longer persuade. As contemporary disaffection from the conventional political process continues to worsen, such alternative modes of public self-recognition expand their appeal. The possibility of mapping personal experiences onto a public landscape of known and common events by using the memorializing repertoire (autobiographies, oral histories, museums, monuments, anniversaries, media celebrations, and national holidays) as the medium for alternative recuperative histories may allow a different ground of memory to be reclaimed.

Memory work as such has no specific political valence. In this sense, Pierre Nora's remarkably popular multivolume project *Les lieux de mémoire*, on French national history, provides one of the most grandiose of recent illustrations. It can be read as wanting to shift national identity decisively away from its older obsessions with the national state, in a spirit more in keeping with European integration, the postnational future, and the idea of a common European home. But Nora's paradigm of the "sites of memory" markedly depoliticizes the national question. For the highly centered national consensus of the old French Republican tradition, it substitutes a fragmented and discrete mélange of disparate topics, which nonetheless accomplish their own concentration of French national memory in a more insidiously ethnocentric manner. That more oblique recentering affirms an aggregated sense of common cultural identity, while excluding those parts of contemporary French society—Islamic, North African, migrant—who can't find themselves in the national past's assembled mosaic.⁸⁸

There's a potential left-wing stake in this new discourse of memory and locatedness, for which the crisis of socialism in the post-1989 political conjuncture blazed the path. By shocking the Left out of its accustomed thinking about political futures, the end of Communism

compelled a revisiting of earlier histories—not least in Eastern Europe itself, where the discourse of loss, dispossession, and displacement could be mapped most directly, if most painfully, onto the retrieving of earlier lived (that is, remembered) experiences of actual dates, events, places, names, and forms of historical agency. Through this complicated process of return, the concept of memory itself can be loosened from its earlier toxic connotations of right-wing “blood and soil” philosophy, encouraging the Left to think more positively about the nation in this finely located way. Such possibilities also resonate with postcolonial efforts at theorizing the emplacement of struggles for independence, social justice, and human rights in very particularized contexts of locality and ethnic recognition. Despite its growing identification with migrancy, diaspora, and hybridity, postcoloniality is a condition only ever experienced through its localized modalities, even as its subjects find themselves being relocated to the multicultural social scenes of the metropolis. In these terms, a language of recollection can become a language of recognition. The Left’s classic utopian telos of a placeless futurity becomes replaced—for good and ill—by an image of the good society remembered in time and grounded in place, mapped onto specificities of history and experience. “Memory” supplies the language of this move.

In these terms, “memory” offers a crucial site of identity formation under our contemporary predicament, a way of deciding who we are and of positioning ourselves in time and place, given the hugeness of the structural changes now so destructively remaking the world—in the new era of capitalist restructuring defined by globalization, the end of Communism, and the “post-Fordist transition.” It became a commonplace of the 1990s to speak of the “postmodern condition,” while another claim placed us more tendentiously at the “end of history.” Whatever the merits of these particular arguments, the memory boom seems related in one way or another to this “cultural logic” of a contemporary transition.⁸⁹ The new information technologies and electronic mass media are also involved. Processes of commodification and the commercialization of culture, in the consumer economies of entertainment and stylistic display, produce a postmodern economy of signs in which the mobile arbitrariness of historical imagery and citation becomes rampantly unavoidable. In that way, too, the contemporary sensibility becomes a memorializing one. We

are constantly being invited to place ourselves in relation to one kind of “past” or another. The contemporary public sphere issues constant incitements to memory in that sense.⁹⁰

An endless procession of anniversaries provides another part of this story. The national referents vary. The great extravaganza of 1989 in France, which sought to declare the French Revolution finally “over,” was only the most dramatic of these culturally particular events. The most spectacular cross-national commemorations involved the extended and ramified remembering of World War II, beginning with the fortieth anniversary of the European peace, in 1985, and continuing through the sequence of fiftieth anniversaries from the outbreak of war in 1939, D-day, and the liberation (six years later). That public calendar spawned an extraordinary degree of commemorative excess, over-running the spaces of public representation and the television screens in particular, while triggering a plethora of private recollections.⁹¹

Once again, the meaning of all this activity—of so much obsessional public remembering—lies beyond the formal occasion and the immediate contents themselves. In Europe, surely, the sense of an ending—both internationally (with the end of the Cold War, the strengthening of the European Union, and the transnational shrinkage of the globe) and domestically (with the definitive dissolution of the postwar settlement and the recomposition of the social landscape of class)—sent us back to those earlier moments. In effect, we were returning home, revisiting the origins, reopening the history that produced the contemporary world, even as the latter turned out to be lost. This is what sensitizes us so easily to the past as a field of meaning.

Developments within history as a specialized activity—as a discipline—further explain memory’s salience as a kind of thematics. Claiming the postwar era for teaching and scholarly research has played its part, so that historians are now able to write about the years when they were themselves biographically formed. Until very recently, 1945 acted as a boundary of the present in a limiting way. Oral history’s slow acceptance as a subdisciplinary area since the mid-1970s has made a difference—again with its own journals, professional associations, conferences, institutional bases, individual classics, agreed methods, technologies, and evolving traditions. The power of interdisciplinarity, with its early institutional bridgeheads from the 1960s and more recent flourishing, likewise created homes for sophisticated intellectual work on memory. Until historians’ sus-

pictions toward anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, and other theoretical traditions became allayed, discussions wouldn't escape the narrowly drawn technical debates about the problems of using oral sources.

In this last respect, cultural studies certainly provided the main framing and impetus for the growth of memory as an intellectual priority. Treating memory as a complex construct shaped within and by the public field of representations, which needs to be approached via forms of interdisciplinary collaboration, owes everything to the analytical languages developed in cultural studies during the past three decades.⁹² Those languages have recast our perceptions of the past in the present, pointing us to all the ways in which history becomes evoked and addressed. It alerts us to the wide range of sites and media through which remembering (and forgetting) take place in a public sphere, consciously and unconsciously, through film and television, photographs and advertisements, radio and song, theater, museums and exhibits, tourist spots and theme parks, fictions, ceremonials, school curricula, political speeches, and more. In this way, the wider domain of ideas and assumptions about the past in a society has been claimed for historical study, so that the historian's customary ground—that is, the boundaries of accepted historical analysis, the definition of what counts as a legitimate source and an acceptable subject—falls more and more into question.

The resulting possibilities are either extremely unsettling or extremely exciting, depending on the defensiveness of one's disciplinary standpoint. They confuse many of the older ways of defining the historian's distinctive practices and identity, freeing up the established disciplinary constraints and opening the imagination to a far more mobile agenda with a much wider repertoire of legitimate approaches and methods. This produces an extremely fruitful indeterminacy. It upsets the customary approach to the boundary between "memory" and "history," where the one was once straightforwardly the professional organizing and contextualizing of the other. History literally "disciplined" memory in that older approach. It shaped and educated the raw and unreliable rememberings of individuals as it called into action the superior languages of objectivity, facing their partial and subjective accounts with the truth of the archive, the "reality" of the historical record, and the "facts."

Precisely along that fault line, a certain de-professionalizing of his-

torical knowledge has been at work. We're now used to finding historical thinking and historical research in places other than university history departments—partly elsewhere in the academy, but partly in the culture at large, in various amateur and lay pursuits. For Raphael Samuel, one of the most eloquent chroniclers and theorists of the implied process of redefinition, this shift made history into “an organic form of knowledge,” “drawing not only on real-life experience but also memory and myth, fantasy and desire; not only the chronological past of the documentary record but also the timeless one of ‘tradition.’” Samuel explains:

History has always been a hybrid form of knowledge, syncretizing past and present, memory and myth, the written record and the spoken word. Its subject matter is promiscuous. . . . In popular memory, if not in high scholarship, the great flood or the freak storm may eclipse wars, battles and the rise and fall of governments. As a form of communication, history finds expression not only in chronicle and commentary but also ballad and song, legends and proverbs, riddles and puzzles. Church liturgies have carried one version of it—sacred history; civic ritual another. A present-day inventory would need to be equally alert to the memory work performed (albeit unintentionally) by the advertisers, and to the influence of tourism. . . . As a self-conscious art, history begins with the monuments and inscriptions, and as the record of the built environment suggests, not the least of the influences changing historical consciousness today is the writing on the walls. The influence of video-games and science-fiction would be no less pertinent in trying to explain why the idea of chronological reversal, or time traveling, has become a normal way of engaging with the idea of the past.⁹³

Some of the favorite subject matters of cultural studies—exhibitions and museums, cinema and photography, magazines and popular fictions—have been ideal for exploring the porousness of the boundaries between academic history and the wider universe of knowledges about the past, described by Samuel. This is also where history's relationship to memory is being rethought. The relatively new journal *History and Memory*, the main standard-bearer for such work inside the profession, displays exactly this range of influences. Film, both as a visual record of the past and as a form for the production of history in

its own right, is attracting widening attention. The critical and eclectic appropriation of psychoanalytic theory of various kinds has played a key role, whose potentials historians have begun only slowly to explore. Photography likewise affords rich opportunities, particularly for the social and cultural history of the family and personal life. Finally, in all of these areas, the impact of feminist theory and politics has been simply enormous, clearing the path for new initiatives and directly inspiring many of the most creative departures. Feminism's challenge has legitimized the study of subjectivity, eventually forcing historians to deal with such questions. The analytical uses of autobiography and various combinations of cultural theory, psychoanalysis, and history have been especially exciting.

Backing Away from the Social: History's New Borderlands

Being a historian at the start of the twenty-first century can mean a wide variety of things. In all of the ways previously mentioned (and many others besides), the boundaries have been coming down. As a result, history's borderlands are now far less defended against other disciplines or types of knowledge than they were forty or even twenty years ago. The traffic is two-way: historians visit the other places of understanding far less furtively than before and are also far more receptive to intrusions from the outside, whether these spring from other disciplines and fields of knowledge or from everyday life, popular culture, and parts of the public sphere. This double broadening of history's horizons, toward other parts of the academy and toward the wider social and cultural contexts of historical thinking discussed by Raphael Samuel, enables a new starting point for exploring the images of the past circulating through a society's public and private worlds.

This novel multiplicity of possible histories and the porousness of the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the academic discipline were a vital part of the crisis experienced by social historians. As the earlier part of this chapter argued, a new caution developing during the 1980s in relation to social analysis and the history of society led many to back away from the more grandiose ambitions of an earlier period and the confident materialism sustaining them. Concurrently, greater interest developed in questions of subjectivity and all aspects of personal life, for which feminism certainly supplied the

most far-reaching and sustained inspiration. Both these developments were associated with what became commonly known as the “linguistic turn” or “cultural turn,” namely, the interconnected controversies that were exploding around the given theories, methods, and epistemological standpoints of the human sciences by the turn of the 1990s.

Writing the intellectual history of that extraordinarily complex intellectual upheaval—in a manner commensurate with all its unevenness and diversity and with the broader cultural, social, and political forces partially explaining it—has so far eluded most commentators. It becomes ever clearer that the favored shorthand descriptions—“cultural turn,” “linguistic turn,” and “postmodernism”—were coined in the heat of relatively short-lived, but extremely polarizing, initial battles, disguise as much as they clarify, and conflate manifold variations. Announced in a 1989 volume of essays that blurred distinctions in just that way (foregrounding certain approaches of lesser staying power while neglecting or ignoring others), “new cultural history” became another of these talismanic descriptions. It helped a disparate miscellany of new approaches and subjects to be broached during the 1990s, allowing a motley assortment of radicals, innovators, and outliers to assemble under its banner. But in retrospect, it begged a great many questions as well.⁹⁴

Turning to “culture” was the rather vague common denominator for heterogeneous discontents. By offering a label of convenience for an emergent skepticism about the study of “society,” it brought to voice the gathering unease with an existing paradigm. It bespoke the growing appeal of smallness of setting, a moving away from big-scale structural histories of whole societies. During the earlier social history wave, the desire for an integrated account of society as a whole, sometimes voiced through a concept of “total history,” usually implied the even larger comparative frameworks of development theory drawn from the social sciences. Such frameworks emphasized “big structures, large processes, and huge comparisons,” whose pursuit pervaded the metadiscourse of social science historians during that time.⁹⁵ But by the 1980s, country by country, some disillusionment with those ambitions was beginning to set in.

One example of this disillusionment was the interest in “microhistory,” a program proposed by Italian historians grouped around the journal *Quaderni Storici*, who were inspired by anthropology more than sociology, by the idiosyncratic or deviant anomaly rather than the sta-

tistically predictable or representative norm, and by a more “conjectural” than “scientific” method. Dissatisfied with social science history because it imposed the standard of the large scale and the *longue durée* and insisted on the superiority of quantitative methodology, this group sought to bring historical study down to the everyday life and lived experience of concrete individuals, as the best way of rendering the same large questions intelligible.⁹⁶

This Italian grouping was certainly not the only example of a developing skepticism about the grand ambitions of social history in its reigning sociological or Marxist forms. A similar movement was under way by the late 1970s in West Germany. It converged with the Italian departures and adopted some of the same language, while flying its own banner of *Alltagsgeschichte*, or the history of everyday life.⁹⁷ In French history, Natalie Zemon Davis held a similar place since the late 1960s, with a series of pioneering essays. With the publication of *The Return of Martin Guerre* in 1983, she made much wider waves in the profession at large, a disturbance further reinforced, around the same time, by Robert Darnton’s *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*.⁹⁸ Across the English Channel, in Britain, social historians had been less swept up in the ambitions of social science history in its more robust and dogmatic guise. The ebullient critiques coming from Edward Thompson and others provided strong countervailing inspiration in that regard.⁹⁹

One of the biggest new departures subsumed beneath the sloganeering of the “new cultural history” during the 1980s was feminist advocacy of gender history. Perhaps the single most influential—and necessarily contentious—early prospectus for the new approaches in general was Joan Scott’s 1986 article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” which became a benchmark text for any historian seeking to grasp what was at stake in the linguistic turn. A brilliant work of lucid advocacy defined by eclectic poststructuralist affiliations, Scott’s essay presented gender as the variable and contested construction of sexual difference, which was also “a primary way of signifying relations of power.”¹⁰⁰ As such, it demanded the attention of historians at large rather than just those who happened to be working on gender relations *per se*.

Using a “deconstructive” method borrowed from the writings of the philosopher and literary theorist Jacques Derrida and a theory of power based on the ideas of Michel Foucault, Scott argued that the

interrogation, breaking down, and opening out of accepted categories should be one of the historian's leading tasks. Doing this could make clear the contingent or constructed history of seemingly natural or stable terms of distinction, such as sex and gender, but also race, class, nation, and any other modern term of agency and belonging, including the very idea of the subject or the self. Moreover, in addition to its more purely methodological challenge to historians, this effort always carried a highly charged political meaning. If such "naturalized" systems of meaning could be shown to have been negotiated and contested in the past, they might become similarly vulnerable to questioning for the present and the future.

Scott's proposals proved hugely controversial, in ways that can't be gone into here.¹⁰¹ They formed one central item in the so-called culture wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s as those "wars" affected the discipline of history. In that time, the bitterness dividing the adherents of the opposing positions was angry and intense. For a while, the space for effective thinking about genuinely difficult questions became gratuitously narrowed by the mutually exclusive epistemological choices that supporters and enemies of poststructuralism alike now sought to impose. The fixing of discussion to theories of language and textuality seemed to present feminist historians of gender with a strict polarity of options between "cultural" and "social" approaches, so that the disputes reproduced much the kind of restrictive binary opposition that Scott herself had originally wanted to refuse. But beneath all the turmoil of such positioning, a much greater diversity of work was always being done.

While the partisans of the linguistic turn and the defenders of social history were seeking to drum their respective allies into camps, a contingent of mainly younger historians were patiently exploring how both approaches might be joined. Undertaking such a work of synthesis, even at the level of generous-spirited and experimental conversation, was always a fraught thing to attempt. The pervasiveness of the debates at the height of the fighting in the early 1990s usually ruled out the option of simply absenting oneself from the fray. Wrestling with the issues required enormous energy and time—for the purposes of reading, arguing, writing, and thinking. Between the overwrought intensity of the polemics and the production of seriously grounded historical studies, either some time needed to elapse or other kinds of distance had to be present.¹⁰²

But if troubling in their divisiveness, the polemical extremes also pushed back the boundaries and clarified the differences. If the space for publicly refusing the starkness of the choices took a while to open up, the practical coalescence of more hybrid possibilities has now become much easier to see. Behind the surface tumult of the linguistic turn, historians in a variety of areas were creatively subjecting the best of the older approaches to the exciting challenges of the new, across a wide variety of periods and themes—in labor history; in analyses of the welfare state; in histories of medicine, the law, and other professions; in studies of schooling and pedagogy; in readings of popular culture; in work on sexuality; in histories of empire, colonialism, and race.

Moreover, this process of fermentation was not occurring exclusively inside the discipline, sealed off from the outside. For one thing, the dynamism and excitement were intimately linked to the spread of an interdisciplinary consciousness, which can be charted institutionally between the late 1980s and mid-1990s, leading, by the end of the nineties, to significant consolidation—through journals, conferences, debates, and key publications and eventually within particular universities, by the launching of seminars, initiatives in curriculum, the founding of institutes, the allocation of funding, and the creation of new departments and programs. In a number of major universities, including my own, the very texture of scholarly, pedagogical, and general intellectual exchange became interdisciplinary through and through. For historians, accordingly, the bundle of theoretical influences shaping such texts as Joan Scott's 1986 article or circulating more broadly through the discipline was always generated elsewhere, either in other disciplines (such as anthropology, psychoanalysis, and literary theory) or among typically "adisciplinary" thinkers, such as Stuart Hall, Nancy Fraser, or Michel Foucault. Where innovative work is being produced, it's hard to find historians who are not in conversation with other disciplines by now, whether through collaborative research, in their teaching, in their conference attendance, or simply in whom they read and cite.

This is where the relationship between academic history and the rest of the world becomes particularly hard to disentangle. As the preceding reflections suggest, the sense of the past in a society embraces far more than merely the activities of the scholarly discipline, just as academics are themselves constantly interacting with a society's wider

images and ideas of the past, whether consciously or in less reflected ways. As a field of meaning, history is always beset by these doubled understandings—on the one hand, of history as past time, as a distinct set of subject matters and all the ways historians seek to work on them; on the other hand, of history as a sign in and for the present, a container of contemporary meanings, with all the complexities that produces in the representational arena, enabling the constant and disorderly back-and-forth between a deceptively finished “then” and a patently active “now.”¹⁰³ What makes the historian’s predicament so interesting these days is precisely the intensity of the interaction between these two types of understanding. The relationship in itself is nothing new. But the willingness of historians to see it may be.

Ideas Change—but How?

Joan Scott’s essays of the mid-1980s were certainly a central item in this repertoire. But a much wider range of debates were in play, varying field by field and country by country. With respect to gender history per se, the narrative I know best at firsthand—from my perspective as a Marxist historian educated in Britain, working on Germany, and migrating in 1979 to the United States—began in the mid-1970s, with Marxist-influenced analyses of women’s oppression under capitalism, while moving rapidly to critiques of what the available Marxisms were able to offer. To grasp the ways in which women lived their oppression, feminists then turned quickly to theories of ideology and subjectivity, so that barely a few years had elapsed before psychoanalysis seemed to replace Marxism as the main point of orientation. In the resulting mix, literary theory and theories of language—shaped both by readings of the French feminist theorists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous and by the wider reception of Foucault, Derrida, and Jacques Lacan—converged with an emerging interest in film, popular reading genres, and other aspects of popular culture across the burgeoning territories of cultural studies.¹⁰⁴ But again, if the ensuing theory debates could often be divisive, the lasting outcomes for historians materialized behind these more visible and sometimes grandstanding polemics, as the more focused and concrete historical projects gradually took shape. However constructive—and

indeed unavoidable—the debates over theory may have been, the ultimate payoff came in the actual histories they enabled.

Allowance also has to be made for serendipity. Certain texts excited historians during the eighties, not because they were consciously adopted as an avant-garde, but because they worked symptomatically by bringing together disparate needs and discontents, by answering questions barely waiting to be posed, and by feeding nascent desires for change. Each individual text of that kind has a history, of course. The conditions of possibility for its production—by a particular author, in a particular institutional scene, with particular resources and supports, surrounded by all the determinate circumstances (intellectually, socially, culturally, and politically) that historians are used to exploring—can certainly be defined. With sufficient perspective, using all the appropriate tools and strategies of contextualization, historians can bring these complicated intellectual patterns into focus, endowing them with persuasive coherence. In retrospect, as the genealogy of any radical intellectual departure becomes convincingly historicized in that way, the interconnectedness of the relevant texts, ideas, and movements can then be established, and their earlier pedigree can be identified. But for those who are living through a particular process of intellectual change at the time, the sheer unexpectedness of the relevant influences can seem far more impressive.

The authors of the works I want to highlight here were only ambiguously historians in the usual accredited sense. They came from the margins of the profession, were writing outside the normal conventions of monographic or similar scholarship, or were working as historians in other disciplines. Everyone will have their own preferred candidates for such a list. My own choice necessarily reflects the particularities of my own standpoint and were among the most widely read and discussed in the way I'm suggesting. They unlocked possibilities for new ways of thinking among historians. They took such thinking outside the proverbial box.

I give first mention to a trio of works (in descending order of resonance) whose imaginative methodologies, radical epistemology, originality of subject, and general quirkiness placed them self-consciously at odds with the prevailing conventions of social history in their fields: Carlo Ginzburg's study of the heretical cosmology of the sixteenth-century miller of Friuli, Menocchio, in *The Cheese and the Worms*;

Jacques Rancière's *The Nights of Labor: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, which called into question the projections of proletarian authenticity only recently constructed by social historians around the figure of the radical artisan; and Wolfgang Schivelbusch's extended reflection on the cultural meanings of "the railway journey" for the nineteenth century's transformed understandings of the new technological modernity of the industrializing world.¹⁰⁵ The synchronicity of the influence of these works isn't exact. Ginzburg's book was published in Italy in 1976 and appeared fairly rapidly in translation four years later; the 1981 French edition of Rancière's work was extensively discussed among English-speaking social historians ahead of its translated publication in 1989; *The Railway Journey* enjoyed an altogether more subterranean influence, appearing in Germany in 1977 and New York two years later, but entering social historians' consciousness much more slowly.¹⁰⁶ Yet each of these works challenged social history's presuppositions in a similar manner, encouraging a different vision of evidence, subject matters, and the writing strategies historians could entertain.

These historians were all mavericks operating on the edges of the profession, with a variety of eclectic and esoteric knowledges in their training and background—from philology, art criticism, and literary theory to drama, philosophy, and general cultural analysis. The next works I'll cite reemphasize the same type of connections, with further admixtures of psychoanalytic thought, anthropology, and British cultural studies, within the overall framing provided by the interest in poststructuralism. They included Benedict Anderson's extraordinarily influential reflections on "the origins and spread of nationalism" in *Imagined Communities* (1983); Ronald Fraser's oral history of his own childhood in the English Home Counties during the 1930s and 1940s, *In Search of a Past* (1984); Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country* (1985), which explored the refashioning of the national past in Britain during the 1980s and its embedding in the experience of everyday life; *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression*, by Peter Stallybrass and Alon White (1986), which deployed readings of "the high and the low" to construct an argument about the shaping of bourgeois sensibilities between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, using Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of "carnival"; Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986), which used the author's own autobiography and the life of her mother to call some of the main tropes of British social his-

tory into question; and Denise Riley's extended reflection on the shifting historical indeterminacy of the category of "women" in "*Am I That Name?*" (1988).¹⁰⁷

None of these works was by a historian in the fully credentialed professional sense—that is, someone teaching, researching, and writing inside a university history department. Only one of the authors, Carolyn Steedman, was even trained in history as such, but she worked first as a schoolteacher, before being appointed to a post in arts education at the University of Warwick. Otherwise, these eminently recognizable historians were trained in political science (Anderson), literature (Fraser, Stallybrass, and White), cultural studies (Wright), and philosophy (Riley). Those with full-time or permanent academic positions taught in departments of government (Anderson), cultural and community studies (Stallybrass), European studies (White), and arts education (Steedman). The rest taught in universities at various times but worked as much or mainly outside the academy altogether, whether as a writer and novelist (Fraser), a journalist (Wright), or a philosopher and poet (Riley). They were all—highly complicatedly and, in Anderson's case, rather tenuously—British. Fraser (born 1930) and Anderson (born 1936) were older, but the others had a distinctive history in common: they were born between the late 1940s and early 1950s, shaped by the postwar culture of the welfare state, and formed by both the radicalisms of the 1960s and 1970s and the ensuing disappointments.

As the explicit framing of each of these books makes abundantly clear, the politics animating this generational experience was vitally implicated in the new vision of history beginning to emerge. By no means all the key elements in the intellectual politics of the 1970s and 1980s are captured by this particular selection of people and texts. Their range is heavily Eurocentric and falls patently short of the radical changes in thinking about questions of race, ethnicity, colonialism, and empire (described earlier in this chapter) that were gathering pace during the same time. A different kind of list might easily begin from the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 and the earliest of the Subaltern Studies volumes in 1981. It could then continue through the Birmingham CCCS's collective volume *The Empire Strikes Back* (1982) and Paul Gilroy's "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*" (1987), gathering up along the way essays by Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Stuart Hall or such books as James C. Scott's *Weapons of the Weak*

(1985), before culminating in Said's later *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).¹⁰⁸ But as I've already argued, the impact of these departures began materializing in comparable works of history only somewhat later, more in the 1990s than in the 1980s. Moreover, the arguments concerned were far less historically grounded in formal terms than those of the books I've preferred.¹⁰⁹ For a historian mainly working on Britain and other parts of Western Europe, their impact took longer to mature.

What do my preferred works have in common apart from their provenance in the borderlands of the discipline? For one thing, none conform to the historian's conventional genres of writing, such as the scholarly research monograph or the general survey. They all experiment with method and form. Some work through a series of essayistic reflections, whether ordered in rough and overlapping temporal sequences (Anderson, Riley, Stallybrass and White) or offered simply as an interconnected cluster of analytical vignettes (Wright). Others—notably, Fraser and Steedman—play more radically with writing strategies and literary forms, challenging our expectations with a very different kind of design, one that joins the structure of the psychoanalytic case study to the explanatory architecture of the work of history, or “stories” to “interpretations,” in Steedman's words.¹¹⁰ All of them depart from the more familiar rules of evidence. None rely on the archive in the stricter sense often attributed to professional historians—certainly in the early dissertation stages of their careers or in the official hierarchies of disciplinary attainment and prestige, for which a proven standing as an “archival scholar” is the necessary ticket. None would pass the test urged by Geoffrey Elton's *The Practice of History*, with its austere and arid insistence on the primacy of traditional and narrowly based archival research.¹¹¹

These authors certainly show no disregard toward archival scholarship itself. Elsewhere, Carolyn Steedman has written eloquently about the challenges and pleasures of working in the archive in the practical dusty old sense.¹¹² These works promote not the abandonment of the professional historian's archival calling or of the established protocols of archival research but an imaginative broadening of what these can entail. This partly involves recognizing what the conventional archive is not, or seeing all the things it can never contain. Actually existing archives aren't exactly the neutral storehouses of the entirety of the past record implied by a traditional “objectivist” stance, preserving

history whole or providing direct transmissions from a vanished time. On the contrary, archives are extraordinarily partial and contingent things. Whether in the official repositories of state-sanctioned record keeping (such as the National Archives or the Public Record Office), in the many other places where institutional records are kept, or simply in private collections, they are organized around habits and programs of selectivity, through which certain kinds of documents are privileged while others are rejected or transformed. Through archives, the past is damaged and spoiled as much as preserved.

The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragments that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there. . . . It is indexed, and catalogued, and some of it is not indexed and catalogued, and some of it is lost. But as stuff it just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativized.¹¹³

Thus, conventional archives are not only partial and selective; they are also inert. This dual insight unsettles all the traditionalist assumptions about the sovereignty of the archive in the classical objectivist sense. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the resulting implications caused no end of trouble for the organizing principles and orderly routines of the professional historian's imaginary landscape of knowledge. On the one hand, the archive's documentary contents—the physical traces of past times—mean nothing until historians actually set to work on them. Otherwise, the records sit there unused, either unknown or the guardians of an assumed understanding, hidden monuments to an already established account. On the other hand, archives possess their own story, embedded in the processes that created them, in the rules and practices governing their administration, and in the aggregate decision making of their staff. Archivists are as much the authors of what they keep as its preservers. How the documents got into the archive—who selected them, how they were organized, how they were guarded, how they were made available—is every bit as complex a question, requiring all the same sophisticated techniques of deconstruction, as how the words got onto the page. All the post-structuralist prescriptions, regarding the instabilities of texts, the complexities of authorship, and the contingencies of presentation, apply.

The next step in this argument is equally crucial, because “the

archive” is no longer found only in the physical and discrete institutional spaces to which we have usually given the name, the buildings where the bundles of files are kept. In the wake of the reception of the ideas of Foucault, the archive has also come to function as a metaphor. In the most abstract versions, it refers indefinitely to the evidentiary foundations for the knowable world. More manageably, it directs us to all the materials surrounding the processes and techniques that make the world available for knowledge, that render it graspable or reducible as such. For Foucault, this approach began with his studies of prisons, asylums, hospitals, and the general “order of things,” but it soon progressed to an overarching thesis about “governmentality,” embracing the plenitude of practices developed by states for the purposes of managing and ruling their populations.

If we start thinking of the archive not just as the physical buildings where documents are stored but also as encompassing the wider processes—institutional, political, social, cultural, even epistemological—that defined and produced what the documents contained, some interesting possibilities emerge. Amid the resulting technologies of surveillance and control, statistical knowledge and processes of classification acquired special importance, as did the coalescence of the academic disciplines later in the nineteenth century. The argument can then be applied to the institutional domains of policing, schooling, and social administration; it can be pushed further, into the intermediate spaces of the professions and the public sphere; and it can be extended, thence, to the ground of civil society itself. The imaginative realms of literature, the arts, and popular culture may also be gathered in. Through all the resulting histories came the invention of “the social” or “society” in its distinctive modern sense.

Once we think of the archive like this, as the traces left by the desire for an intelligible and controllable world (or, more ambitiously, by the drives of states for “the ordering of the world and its knowledges into a unified field”),¹¹⁴ the possible forms an archive might assume for a particular topic or question can dramatically expand. Even considered simply (in practical terms) as places where documents can be stored, archives now greatly diversify in form. They might include “a sound or film library or a collection of postcards or a filing cabinet of oral history interviews” as well as the older types of record keeping or registry.¹¹⁵ But even more, our understanding of what counts as an important or legitimate source

can become blown wide open. Not so long ago, for example, the mainstream of the profession kept the practices of oral history resolutely at bay, on the grounds that oral testimony failed to meet the evidentiary protocols for the integrity of the archive as conventionally understood. But in the meantime, that epistemological boundary, which defined what I called earlier the sovereignty of the archive, has been decisively breached. The road has been extremely rapidly traveled from *The Cheese and the Worms*, through, say, *The Return of Martin Guerre* and Natalie Davis's later work *Fiction in the Archives*, to the extremely exciting methodological free-for-all of the present.¹¹⁶

This questioning of the conventional archive's objectivity and simultaneous broadening of the definition of a permissible source were two of the decisive gains for historians since the 1980s. They were intimately connected: being able to recognize the inventiveness and selectivity in the official keeping of the record, or its necessary arbitrariness, makes it easier to look elsewhere for the archival basis of one's research. This widening of the inventory of possible sources was brilliantly captured by Raphael Samuel in *Theatres of Memory* (quoted earlier in this chapter). Once the historian's agenda was opened up, the way was cleared for all kinds of research topics, often requiring a great deal of inventiveness in the search for sources and an ingeniously creative approach in reading them.

Thus, the topics available for historians have grown with dizzying profusion, to include fashion, shopping, and all aspects of taste, style, and consumption; art, photography, iconography, and visual culture; architecture, landscape, and the environment; drinking, eating, and cigarette smoking; music, dancing, and popular entertainment; histories of gender, tilted more and more toward masculinity; all aspects of the history of sexuality; travel and tourism; clothing, furniture, toys, and other objects of commodification, usefulness, and pleasure; collecting and museums; hobbies and enthusiasms; occultism; psychology, psychiatry, and all areas of medical practice; histories of the body; and histories of emotions. Most of these topics involve contact with other disciplines. Conversely, scholars in anthropology, literature, art history, film studies, and all parts of cultural studies have turned massively to history during the past two decades—certainly by historicizing their perspectives, whether or not they compose their own archives in ways historians would approve or expect.

The Subjective Element

While the key works on my list hardly engaged today's diverse topics in any detailed or grounded fashion, they challenged us to think differently about history. They allowed the established terrain of historical research of the social, political, or intellectual historian to be broken down and recomposed. They made possible its decentering. These books were also joined substantively by a number of common interests. Benedict Anderson and Patrick Wright were centrally concerned with the complexities of national culture, for example, as were the other authors more obliquely. The terms of modern political identity formed a similar common thread, although only some of the authors dealt explicitly with the category of modernity *per se*. More than anything else, though, the shared commitment to a history of meaning, focused around questions of political subjectivity, linked these six works together. This signaled the passage from social history into cultural history, in a number of ways.

First and most obviously, this turn to subjectivity has enabled a resurgence of interest in biography. The writing of individual biographies was one of the earliest casualties of the rise of social history during the 1960s and 1970s. With much justification, social historians dismissed the biographical approach as an example of everything in the discipline that needed modernizing, deriding it as either the benighted traditionalism of old-fashioned political historians or the trivializing and frivolous recourse of the nonprofessional. The pursuit of structural or broadly contextualized materialist analysis of various kinds, in contrast, became equated with a necessary degree of scholarly seriousness. By the 1980s, however, with feminist scholars in the lead, some historians were rethinking this stance. Rather than continuing to see biography as a simplification, they reclaimed it for complexity. Individual lives might now be revisited as complex texts in which the same large questions that inspired the social historians were embedded. Only a different range of theory and techniques would be required. The intersection of elaborate and multiform forces might be traced through and inside a particular life, allowing the generalized and the abstract to be focused through the personal and the particular. The resulting histories might take the form of a full-scale biography, or the biographical might take its place in a wider repertoire of analy-

sis. The individual life became one of the sites where microhistory could be practiced.¹¹⁷

Second, the incipient culturalism of the 1980s exhausted existing theories of ideology. Again, my particular version of this story is personal and begins in the British Marxist debates of the 1970s, as certain classical and pragmatic applications of the “base and superstructure” metaphor among historians began collapsing under the pressure of sustained theoretical critique. That critique proceeded from the ideas of Louis Althusser, moved rapidly through an intense engagement with the thought of Antonio Gramsci, and began responding to the challenge of feminism. In escaping from a resulting impasse at the end of the 1970s, British Marxists turned increasingly to versions of Foucault, psychoanalytic theory, and cultural studies, while many feminists struggled toward theories of sexed and gendered subjectivity.¹¹⁸ Until that time, most social historians tended to approach ideology through antinomies of coercion and consent or domination and resistance, addressing questions of popular conformity and rebellion from a class-analytic point of view. Under the impact of the new debates, however, the received materialist paradigm of class experience and class consciousness began to break down. By the mid-1980s, social historians were no longer so confident about the potential translations from oppression and exploitation into forms of collective action. They stressed instead the contradictory meanings through which class tended to be lived. Whether in exploring the ambivalence of individuals or grasping “how patterns of dependency, paternalism, [and] deference were reproduced in other contexts in the wider society,” the classical Marxist causalities of class relations and class consciousness no longer held.¹¹⁹ Other approaches to subjectivity came due.

Third, the turn to subjectivity was borne by the ur-feminist axiom of the late 1960s and early 1970s, “the personal is political.” At one level, it registered the latest stage in the working through of one of the primary problems in women’s history—namely, the relationship between family, domesticity, and intimate life, on the one hand, and the public worlds of politics, on the other. If the marginalizing of women from political power had always encouraged feminist historians to seek female voices elsewhere—in family and household, in the education of children, in religion, in the pleasures of consumption and entertainment, in all the unspectacular spaces of the everyday—the

same linkage of the personal to the political now formed the key starting point for each of the works under discussion. How could individual subjectivities be sutured to larger political identities and loyalties, such as the nation or a class? Again, this was a two-way street: through such processes, individuals might be constrained and imprisoned as well as enabled or set free. We might invent identities from our own immediately lived experiences or fashion agency through our intimate encounters with the concretely experienced social actualities of inequality and difference. But we could do so only by living out and appropriating the consequences of scripts written and codified elsewhere.

Fourth, psychoanalysis vitally influenced the theorizing of exactly these questions. At an early stage of the discussions, in the 1980s, Timothy Ashplant usefully summarized this starting point: "Two points in particular stood out: the relationship between the inner psychic realm studied by psychoanalysis and the external world studied by history; and the role of language as mediating between these moments."¹²⁰ Of course, even as the validation and critique of language by psychoanalysis was being upheld, linguistic analysis itself was becoming problematized via deconstruction and the resulting "crisis of interpretation."¹²¹ Such emerging complexities notwithstanding, psychoanalysis promised strategies for dealing with a number of social history's abiding problems. It answered the lack of a theory of the individual subject, which neither Marxism nor other materialist sociologies had managed to address. It recognized the power of the emotional drives and resistances behind social and political movements. Most important of all, it acknowledged the elusiveness and opacity of the relationship between an originating event and the resulting circumstances or putative outcomes. This emphasis on "undecidability" and the associated dialectics of memory and forgetting helped undermine the social historian's given assumptions about causality. This applied most palpably to the books by Fraser, Steedman, and Riley.¹²²

Fifth, conceding the elusiveness of the relationship to the originating event expands the instigating role of the historian's own questions and the relevance of the standpoints from which they are asked. This brings the historian into his or her own text, while emphasizing the present tense of the historian's voice.

To begin to construct history, the writer has to do two things, make two movements through time. First of all, we need to search backwards from the vantage point of the present in order to appraise things in the past and attribute meaning to them. When events and entities in the past have been given their meaning in this way, then we can trace forward what we have already traced backwards, and make a history.¹²³

This is not really a “presentism” in the earlier and more directly politicized 1960s sense, in which the sloganeering of a “usable past” sought to erect “relevance” into an ethical prerequisite for historians wanting to place themselves on the left. Rather, it invites a certain self-reflectiveness when faced with the raw and unmediated inertness of the past, including an honesty in openly constructing one’s standpoint and a willingness to acknowledge the shifting and provisional bases from which the questions can only ever be asked. This perspectivalism is not exactly without precedent, and there are many foretastes in the classics of historiographical commentary. But since the 1980s, more working historians have become more conscious of its force for more of their time than ever before. It is scarcely possible to avoid encountering the practical and theoretical dilemmas it brings. In some history departments, it supplies the very air we breathe.

Finally, for all of these departures, feminism was absolutely crucial. The pioneering women’s histories of the seventies were rarely noticed by the leading social historians, who were issuing their classic manifestos of advocacy and crisis. But feminist histories from the eighties were unavoidably at the forefront of the cultural turn. This was something fundamentally new. Earlier, women’s history had been so effectively sidelined into a discrete subfield, conceptualized via “separate spheres” and subsumed into the history of the family, that even such avowedly feminist syntheses as Tilly and Scott’s *Women, Work, and Family* did little to break it out. If one’s field happened to be specific kinds of labor history, the history of the family, or certain kinds of social reform, feminist critiques could hardly be ignored; otherwise, women’s history could be left safely to its own devices. However, once feminists started insisting on gender as a dimension of all human transactions, collective and individual, the situation decisively changed. It started to seem that if sexual differences were variably and

contingently ordered, in contestable as well as stable and normalizing ways, always implicating differences of power, with relevance across all the fronts of social, cultural, and political life, then the feminist challenge could no longer be quite as easily contained.

Carolyn Steedman

In many respects, Carolyn Steedman (born 1947) seems to exemplify the arguments I've been making about the changes in the discipline between the 1960s and now. She certainly began with her feet planted firmly in the post-Thompsonian social history of the late 1960s, attending the University of Sussex as an undergraduate in 1965–68 and completing a Cambridge doctoral thesis entitled "The Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856–1880," published in 1984 as *Policing the Victorian Community*.¹²⁴ Yet ever since *Landscape for a Good Woman* and later works appeared, she's been known mainly as a leading cultural historian.¹²⁵ With respect to another part of my argument, moreover, she worked as a historian completely on the outside. While joining the editorial collective of *History Workshop Journal* in 1984 and moving in the associated circles of women's historians, feminist educators, and history workshopers, she did so with no connection to any university history department. She worked as a primary school teacher during 1974–81, spent two years at a research project on bilingualism in early education at the London Institute of Education, and took an appointment in arts education at the University of Warwick in 1984. For ten years, she researched and wrote as a historian, with widening international resonance but no relationship to her own university's history department. Only in 1994 did she join the latter, with a personal chair. In other words—not unlike other feminist historians of this generation in Britain—she became a leading historian entirely outside the institutional and professional precincts of history as a discipline.¹²⁶

Landscape for a Good Woman shaped Steedman's reputation as a historian. By now, the book has already been much written about and discussed, not only by historians, but also by scholars in literature, anthropology, women's studies, and gender studies—indeed, across the whole cultural studies map. The book holds appeal for anyone interested in the history of autobiography and the forms of writing; in

histories of class and childhood; in the lives written for women and girls (and boys and men) by the main scripts of a culture; in the post-1945 histories of welfare and improvement; in the receding historical imaginary of an older Left; in the still unwritten histories of desire, envy, and longing; or in the enormous complexities of writing a history of the self and subjectivity since the eighteenth century. At the same time, *Landscape* is a highly personal and idiosyncratic work. It functioned for its author as part of a certain learning process that allowed big questions to be worked through, though more epistemologically than in the therapeutic terms we might assume. Steedman was interested, above all, in clarifying the difference between history and the other kinds of stories we tell.

As with the treatments of Edward Thompson and Tim Mason that close the previous two chapters of this book, my reasons for here focusing on Carolyn Steedman's book are autobiographical. Reading it played a key part in my own encounter with the intellectual shifts I'm describing. I could also tell my own convergent set of stories. Like myself, for example, *Landscape's* author belongs to the generation inspired by Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*. I might likewise describe parallel journeys through the safe but dispiriting social and cultural landscapes of the long postwar, whose genealogies of migration and marginality, validation and denial, would look quite familiar. I was also a child of the welfare state. The book's reflections on English childhoods could, to a great extent, be mine. In other respects, of course, our stories would be quite different. Most obviously, I was a boy and not a girl, and through that particular difference, Steedman elaborates an original and searching series of arguments about the gendered narratives of class disadvantage and aspiration. Among these, she composes a kind of "counter-counter-narrative" of impaired popular democracy, intended to work deliberately against Thompson's oppositional counter-narrative of the male labor movement, offered so eloquently in *The Making*. If, in the end, Steedman destabilizes and reenables the latter rather than overturning it, her critique is no less far-reaching for that. Moreover, I choose Steedman's book precisely because of its gendered standpoint: by far the most effective challenge to the given materialisms of social history during the 1980s came from feminists.

Steedman's book used her own and her mother's stories to challenge some of our main scenarios of modern British history and,

indeed, to argue against some of the primary ways in which histories tend to be written—not only the historical presentation of particular topics (such as childhood, motherhood, or class), but also the very process through which historical accounts are conventionally put together. As a formal structure, her book disobeyed all the rules. It ranged back and forth between different parts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between historical works and types of fiction, between history and psychoanalysis, between the personal and the political, and between individual subjectivity and the dominant available narratives of a culture, whether in historiography or politics, grand theory or cultural beliefs, psychoanalysis or feminism. Rather than relating the many particular arguments in the book, though, I want to highlight four specific features.

First, the book's use of the personal voice was immensely liberating. This was partly due to its freedom of form, its refusal of linear narrative; it moved back and forth between Steedman's personal history, the extensive repertoire of historical knowledges needed to shape it, and the forms of grand theory and types of determinism that would otherwise have fixed its available meanings so easily into place. In method, Steedman assembled a case history, giving us what she called "the bits and pieces from which psychological selfhood is made."¹²⁷ Among historians, her use of the personal voice was highly unusual. For those on the left, it struck a particular chord. It authorized reflectiveness at a time when my generation was experiencing a range of uncertainties and disappointments—concerning both the forms of social history we'd expected might explain the world and the types of politics we thought could change it. As I've argued throughout this book, both kinds of optimism were always intimately yoked together.

Second, those disappointments were about the collapse of grand narratives—or, rather, about the inability of existing grand narratives to capture either the directions of contemporary societal change or the diversity of past historical experience. In this respect, Steedman offered a history radically and disconcertingly at variance with the accounts we knew. She told a story of working-class lives that didn't fit; that didn't belong in the available scripts of socialism, the postwar democracy of opportunity, and the solidarities of working-class culture; and that couldn't easily be reconciled with the familiar frameworks of social history and cultural studies. Steedman's story was

about a mother who didn't want to mother, a patriarchy without a patriarch, and forms of longing and desire, envy and exclusion, that spilled outside the acceptable frames of class and gender consciousness. Even more, it was about historians' inability—and unwillingness—to develop a language for dealing with personal longings. It was about what she called “lives lived out on the borderlands . . . for which the central interpretive devices of the culture don't quite work.”¹²⁸

Third, at the same time that it focused a rhetorically “personal” self, Steedman's book constantly reengaged the terms of the “big picture.” In making the argument for the value of a case history—for one version of a microhistory, perhaps—she remained committed to the largest ideas of societal persistence and change, to the most abstract theses about modern subjectivity, and to the biggest of the overarching frameworks of capitalism and its social relations. She refused to dwell exclusively inside the minutiae of personal experience and individual lives instead of moving out to the larger-scale questions of human history (where the present book began, with Edward Thompson and Tim Mason). On the one hand, Steedman focused on those places where history and culture meet subjectivity, to explore how such encounters could be converted into a sense of the self. On the other hand, she showed the ability of the given social and cultural environment to consign some types of selfhood to the margins. In showing us “the fragmented and ambivalent nature of experience and self,” Steedman's case study exposed “the precariousness of theory and class consciousness when it fails to incorporate the wants and needs of the individuals—especially the women—within it.”¹²⁹

Fourth, *Landscape* contains a meditation about “history” in precisely the disciplinary sense—as a type of intellectual practice, a mode of inquiry with materials and rules, a process of cognition, a genre of writing. This is partly an issue of “the archive” in the sense I've already discussed, involving “the massive authority” bestowed on “a storyteller” by history's “appeal to the evidence”—meaning, as Steedman puts it, “the pleasures of the plot shaped according to what the documents forbid, or authorize, but which they never contain in themselves.”¹³⁰ But Steedman also asked what distinguishes history as a kind of writing from other literary or narrative forms, including letters and diaries, novels, autobiographies, and Freudian case studies. What does it permit, and what does it impede or disavow? Her answer explained history as a mode of cognition based on temporality, whose

narratives are ordered around “time and causal connection.” It rests on a “basic historicity,” where “knowledge of chronology and time” inhere.¹³¹

Two additional arguments followed from this claim. One concerned the indefinite and unattainable plenitude of “the way it really was,” or the abstract generality of everything the past theoretically contains, the totality historians can never hope to retrieve.

It seems probable that history cannot work as either cognition or narrative without the assumption on the part of the writer and the reader . . . that there is somewhere the great story, that contains everything there is and ever has been—“visits home, heartbeats, a first kiss, the jump of an electron from one orbital position to another,” as well as the desolate battlefield, the ruined village—from which the smaller story, the one before your eyes now, has simply been extracted.¹³²

From the same indefiniteness, then, comes the argument of historical writing’s openness and instability. Unlike stories claiming completeness, such as autobiographies or novels, historical writing is based on “a recognition of temporariness and impermanence.” Historical inquiry “is constructed around the understanding that things are not over, that the story isn’t finished: that there is no end.” Desires for exhaustiveness and finality notwithstanding, new evidence and arguments will always be found; new accounts can always be made. Thus, histories allow for change. Indeed, they have the *idea* of change inscribed in them: “The telling of a life story is a *confirmation* of that self that stands there telling the story. History, on the other hand, might offer the chance of denying it.”¹³³

In the two decades since *Landscape* appeared, Steedman has continued exploring these themes, returning with particular consistency to the history of the modern idea of childhood, or, rather, to the epistemological work such an idea has been asked to perform. That work is intimately connected to ideas about history. In the course of the nineteenth century, she argues, the desire to see an individual’s childhood “as the buried past, the place that is *there*, within us, but never to be obtained,” acquired epistemological equivalence with the equally modern idea that history could be captured through the documentation assembled into an archive. This homology then perdured, even as the discipline of history began securing its own increasingly separate

institutional credentials: “This understanding of the individual human subject was examined and expressed in many forms of writing in the nineteenth century, from the scientific treatise to slush fiction, though it was growth studies—the popularized physiology of the mid-century—that put new formulations of human insideness—of having an inside, a space within: an interiority—on the cultural agenda.” This understanding of the self—of human subjectivity, its inner constitution, its developmental coordinates, and its burial beneath experience, requiring forms of archaeology to be retrieved—shaped a vital field of interconnections between the modern idea of childhood and thinking about social and political identity. It delivered an “imaginative structure” that allowed individuals to explore the sources of their own self while connecting the resulting descriptions and insights to the larger social world and, thence, to the world of public affairs.¹³⁴

This way of understanding childhood, as “a mapping of analogy and meaning for the self,” which simultaneously inserted actual children into the symbolic landscape of the social world, not only offered a kind of template for reflecting on the pastness where individual presents were embedded (“history” in commonsense and everyday meanings) but also stood more generally for the nineteenth century’s evolving ideas about the origins of the self.¹³⁵ Throughout, as her recurring trope of the “Little Watercress Girl” suggests, Steedman is interested less in the real worlds of children than in the place required of the child in the social thought, moral philosophy, and political theory of the capitalist West.¹³⁶ From Rousseau to Freud, the figure of the child became emblematic for the entailments of the effort at imagining the good society, a central organizing metaphor for how we think about the possibilities of shaping or transforming the social world and, therefore, about the movements of history. No one has written more brilliantly than Steedman—analogically, hermeneutically, or epistemologically—about this complex field of meanings crystallized by the idea of childhood.

When considered with another of her main themes—the relationship of modern forms of writing to the making of the self and to the allied concept of interiority—this focus helps engage precisely those questions of political subjectivity that proved so troubling for social history’s earlier optimism. Indeed, during the past three decades, Steedman has returned consistently to the histories of modern subjectivity, focusing, in particular, on the possibilities for self-fashioning

allowed by various kinds of writing and public performance.¹³⁷ The latter include not only particular genres—novels, diaries, the epistolary form, private copybooks, conduct books, political tracts, social reportage, speaking from public platforms, storytelling, the *Bildungsroman*, biographies, guides for teachers—but also very exceptional texts Steedman happens to have encountered, from John Pearman’s autobiography and the story of *The Tidy House* to a nine-year-old English Punjabi girl’s singing of a storybook.¹³⁸ Some of the resulting narratives proved productive for larger public scripts, feeding (for good or ill) into the Left’s progressivist political programs during the twentieth century.¹³⁹ Others, like the “radical soldier’s tale” or “Amarjit’s song,” were either not noticed, directly disregarded, or silently co-opted—expropriated, in fact—by the dominative scripts of others.

As Steedman observes, this uncertain process of narrative absorption applies also to works of history, including even—or perhaps especially—such great inspirational epics of social history as Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class*, around which Steedman develops a typically original and dissentient reading. The time-bound partialness of Thompson’s account wasn’t only a matter of the absence of women or his masculinist conception of class. Thompson’s more serious omission, Steedman argues, concerned the constitutive importance that a specifically feminized story of sensibility, sexual relationships, and suffering held for the social relations and political theory of the very process of class formation he wanted to describe. This is precisely the story—archetypal, scripted, diffused into a sensibility, discursively elaborated as ideology—that the collective agency imagined for the workingman-as-citizen fundamentally presupposed. For this claim, Steedman draws not only on her own arguments about the history of subjectivity, with its growing eighteenth-century associations of cultivated interiority, but also on a broader historiography concerned with the power of a popular “melodramatic vision” and its empathy for the “suffering self.”

As Thompson wanted to tell the story of *The Making*, Steedman averred, “men come to new political subjectivities in community and collectivity through understanding the meaning of the suffering and exploitation they have experienced.”¹⁴⁰ His telling took an avowedly heroic form that was intended to inspire and did. Yet how do we deal with those workers—men as well as women—who would never have

found themselves in his version of the story, or how do we deal with those parts of life it omitted to describe? While *The Making* “is indeed an epic tale,” it’s also one “which most experience of the men who act as its heroes cannot actually have fitted (or cannot actually have fitted all of the time).”¹⁴¹ At the heart of Thompson’s account remains a startling lacuna: in this period, “the structures of feeling that Thompson delineates, the melodramatic mechanism by which social and self knowledge promotes political revelation, was bound up with the feminine and was almost exclusively figured by a woman and her story.”¹⁴² At some level, Thompson knew this. Yet within the coordinates of the time—the materialist sensibility, the registers of significance and recognition, the learned idioms of politics, the available languages of social history—he wasn’t able to tell that story.¹⁴³

Some years ago, as Steedman suggested to the 1990 Urbana-Champaign Cultural Studies Conference, Thompson’s book had already begun entering that “transitional stage” in the life of a work of written history, when it ceases being used primarily for “its overt subject matter” and starts acquiring a documentary status of its own. It began turning more and more into the repository of the complex sequence of contemporary intellectual, social, and political histories it had partly enabled, becoming a kind of palimpsest of all the intervening hopes and disappointments—“an epic telling of a history that we watch with wonder and pity, that is also now, in our reading, about *us*, and our lost past.” Of course, the book retains a great deal of its earlier substantive value—as “a quarry of information about class formation, the actual meeting of actual men under cover of darkness on moors six miles beyond Huddersfield, and the language they used in consciousness of their making a new political world.” But at the same time, *The Making*’s impermanence now ineluctably supervenes.

Too much has happened for this to operate as a simple historical source; there are too many new items of information—about what women were doing, at that moment, back in Huddersfield, about all the men who were not present at their own class formation, all those who did not “specially want it to happen . . .”; about recent events in Eastern Europe; about all our lost socialisms.¹⁴⁴

Steedman’s corpus—from *The Tidy House* and *Landscape*, through her writings on John Pearman and Margaret McMillan, to *Strange Dis-*

locations and *Dust*—struggles continuously with this legacy of Thompson and the wider ensemble of associated progressivist thought.¹⁴⁵ Her work challenges those received understandings by seeking to recuperate all the subjectivities they've neglected or disavowed; she uses these other stories—for example, her mother's or John Pearman's (and, of course, her own)—to subvert the older narratives. Still more, she reconstructs the overall “structures of feeling” (to use Raymond Williams's term) through which a certain ideal of interiority, associated ideas of femininity and childhood, and a set of presumptions regarding family, sexuality, and personal life were able to ground dominant ways of thinking about culture and politics since the mid-eighteenth century. At the same time, she remains constantly attentive to the processes that can bring individuals to a change in their self-understanding, in particular to the point where they can see through the power of the “prefigurative script” in order to craft the narratives of their lives.¹⁴⁶ She asks: How do we find ourselves in the landscape? How do we place ourselves historically inside our own story?

Does this make Carolyn Steedman into a “new cultural historian”? If that designation is earned by an interest in questions of meaning, language, and subjectivity, the answer is clearly yes. But none of Steedman's books actually depart the ground of social history, and most make a point of reaffirming it. Most of them specifically combine interpretive approaches with the contextualizing analysis and archive of the social historian. Do Steedman's essays “Englishness, Clothes, and Little Things” or “What a Rag Rug Means” deliver cultural history, social history, literary history, intellectual history, or something else entirely?¹⁴⁷ The question seems immaterial. In answer to her own critique of Thompson, moreover, Steedman is now working on the problem of service, servitude, and servants in exactly the period covered by his book. In the most basic of social historical terms—by any criteria, domestic servants formed one of the key working categories of the later eighteenth century—this subject is patently essential to both the history of working-class formation and the new discourse of political economy.¹⁴⁸ Does that spell “cultural history” or the “history of society”? What is the force of the distinction?

Steedman is better described as a historian who understands the theoretical and philosophical implications of doing historical work. She pushes edgily on the boundaries of what historians think they do, but she manages to combine social and cultural history without turn-

ing the results into some risk-free and reassuring middle way. She addresses the insufficiencies and exclusions of a class-centered approach to social history, but she does not abandon the standpoint of “class” altogether. She makes the “cultural turn” without waving goodbye to “the social.” She resists the tyranny of grand narratives without succumbing to an excessively deconstructed identity. Finally, by acknowledging the very historicity of all subjectivities, she exposes the falseness of the dichotomy between the “social” and the “cultural” in the first place. That is what we should take away from reading Steedman’s work: between social history and cultural history, there is really no need to choose.